ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY

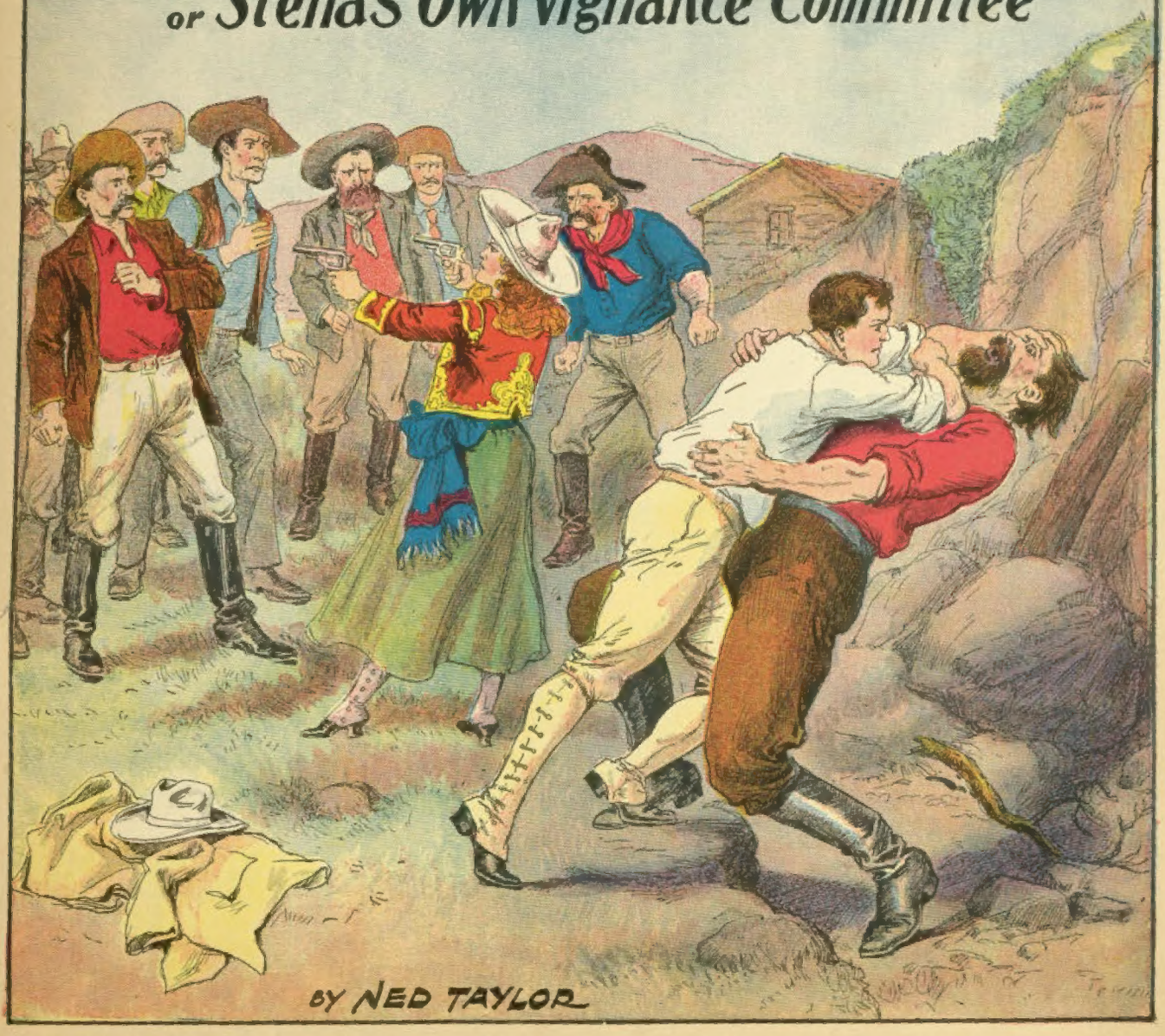
THE BEST WILD WEST STORIES PUBLISHED

Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1906, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C., by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Avenue, N. Y. Application made at the N. Y. Post Office for entry as Second-class Matter.*

No. 105 NEW YORK, APRIL 21, 1906. **Price, Five Cents**

KING OF THE WILD WEST'S POSSE

or Stella's Own Vigilance Committee



"One at a time, gentlemen!" cried Stella, bringing her batteries to bear on the tribe of Faggott. "Fair play for everyone is our motto."

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KING OF THE WILD WEST'S POSSE

OR,

Stella's Own Vigilance Committee.

By NED TAYLOR.

CHAPTER I.

STEALING THE SANTA PIETA MINE.

"We are in for a lot of trouble," said Mr. Walter Graham, as he came into the parlor of the hotel at Mountain Springs, Colorado.

"What is the matter now?" asked his wife.

"The Santa Pieta has been jumped by a lot of fellows who claim that they own it, and that my deed to it is no good."

"Why don't you have the sheriff drive them out? You have the papers to show that the mine is yours."

"I had thought of that, and went to see the sheriff, and he says he can do nothing."

"He must be a pretty sheriff," said Mrs. Graham crossly. "Here we've come up here for a little rest, after our strenuous week in Denver, and now we are to have more trouble."

"The sheriff is a rank coward," said Mr. Graham. "He says if I have a good claim to the mine I ought to go to the courts with it, that the Faggott brothers are in possession, and he doesn't see how he can drive them out, very well."

"I thought all sheriffs were brave?" sighed Mrs. Graham.

"They are before they get into office, but this one seems to have lost all his courage. I'm sure I don't know what to do about it."

"What's the trouble now?" asked Stella Fosdick, entering the room at this moment.

Stella had just returned from a ride over the hills thereabout, and was in a fine glow from her exercise.

Her very presence was inspiring to Mr. Graham, and seemed to put a new aspect on the affair.

She was soon in possession of all the facts about the captured mine.

"You're not going to let those fellows keep it, are you?" she asked.

"Really, the mine is yours Stella, and is part of your father's estate. I have an interest in it. Your father and I bought it, together, about a year ago, but your interest in it is far greater than mine. What do you think about it?"

"If I have anything to say at all, we will not let them keep it. We'll fight them to the last dollar. I don't propose to let any band of claim-jumpers take my property without making a fight for it," cried Stella.

"That's the way to talk," said her uncle, laughing. "That's the way your father used to talk. You should have been a boy."

"I wish I were," answered the girl. "Boys can do so many more things than girls."

"You manage to get into enough trouble as it is," remarked her aunt. "And now I suppose we will be in for another siege if you both insist on staying here and fighting for that mine. I wish I had not left home."

"Cheer up, Aunt Martha," said Stella. "It is all in a lifetime, and I should think you would like a little excitement after living down on that New Mexico ranch so long. But, anyway, we are going to get that mine back from those fellows. That's settled."

The Grahams, accompanied by their niece, Stella Fosdick, had come to Mountain Springs for a rest, and because Mr. Graham wanted to take a look at the Santa Pieta, one of a group of rich mines that surrounded the little mountain town.

The town itself was not very important, and consisted of a few stores and a hotel that was patronized chiefly by tourists in search of health. It had been there before an Eastern engineer had discovered gold and established a paying mine. Then there had been a rush, and other mines had been opened.

All over the mountainsides were the shafts of the mines and the cabins of the miners.

As Mountain Springs was a temperance district there were no saloons in the town, but there were plenty of drinking-places hidden in the cañons.

These saloons were known as "blind tigers," and nearly all of them were the property of nine brothers of the name of Faggott, who ran them and the gambling-rooms attached to them, and who practically controlled the district by the terror they inspired among the more timid residents and miners.

Whether the Faggotts were really all brothers, or not, no one knew, but they all went by the name of Faggott, and when none of them was present they were called the "Faggott Gang."

At the head of this enterprising crew of lawbreakers was Tom Faggott, an enormous specimen of the brute.

Tom Faggott was said to be the strongest man in Colorado. He had been known to break a rock with a blow of his fist, and, once, when there was a fight in the "blind tiger" over which he himself presided, he had cleaned the room out, thrashing the miners who filled the place, and throwing them out one after another.

He was more than six feet tall, and heavily muscled. Besides this he was absolutely fearless, a perfect daredevil in a fight, and when he became angry, even his brothers fled at his approach. He was the master of the Faggott gang and ruled it with a rod of iron, and he controlled the district politically.

Strange enough, it was he who had made this district one in which the sale of liquor was prohibited, by his influence in politics.

At first the people of Mountain Springs thought Tom Faggott had reformed when he came out and declared that no liquor should be sold, and the measure carried at the polls with enthusiasm.

But it was not long before the people woke up to the fact that he had a purpose in his supposed spasm of virtue.

Immediately saloons were opened close to all the principal mines, each one in charge of a Faggott.

Then his purpose became apparent. He did not have to pay a license to the town or county for operating them.

When Sheriff Paxton was running for the office, it was thought that he would at once close the places if he was elected, and the respectable element of the county voted for him, but so, also, did the adherents of the Faggott gang, and he went in with a rush.

But the saloons were not closed, and when the sheriff was taken to task about it, he declared that he could never catch the "blind tigers" in operation.

As a matter of fact, the Faggotts ruled the district, and when a man opposed them he disappeared, either by being killed or chased out of the neighborhood.

The Santa Pieta Mine had begun to pay well, and, as a consequence, had attracted the attention of the Faggotts, who first began to wonder how it had escaped their attention before, and then they began to covet it.

The mine had been placed in charge of a man by the name of Redmond, a good fighter, as Mr. Graham could not leave his ranch to give it his personal attention.

One day Redmond disappeared, and neither his friends nor family had seen him afterward.

The following day the Faggott brothers appeared at the mine and took possession of it, and told the men at work there that they were the new owners. They had hired a lawyer to fix up some fraudulent papers, with which they had imposed upon the superintendent in charge, who did not care who owned the mine as long as he and his men got their pay.

Bill Faggott, one of the brothers, and a notorious bruiser, was placed in charge of the mine, and so matters had gone on until the arrival of Mr. Graham, who had not recently received any reports from Redmond, and thought he would go and take a look at the property himself. When he found it in the possession of Bill Faggott, and had been told that the brothers were the new owners, he was, at first, amazed at the boldness of the robbers, then indignant, only to become more so when he went to the sheriff and was told by that officer that he could do nothing to protect his rights.

After he had heard Stella's decision to fight the Faggotts for the possession of the mine, Mr. Graham went into the courts, and Stella's and his rights to the mine were established without any trouble.

During this time the Faggotts appeared in the courtroom and tried their usual tactics of intimidation. Nine brawny fellows, whose reputations as murderers were well known, and who shot to kill whenever they thought they had a grievance, have great bluffing power in any community, but they had no influence on Mr. Graham, who continued in his efforts to get his rights until he won, and the sheriff was ordered by the court to put the Faggotts out of the mine, and restore it to its rightful owners.

That very day Mr. Graham met Tom Faggott, the leader of the gang, on the street in Mountain Springs.

"You think that you can put us out o' the mine, do yer, by an order o' that court?" said Tom Faggott. "You can't, it's ours, an' thar we stay. An' I want to say to you that you better vamose out o' this yere country as fast as you can. This yere climate is goin' ter git suddently very onhealthy fer you an' yours."

"I'm in pretty good health," said Mr. Graham, "and I've lived in lots of unhealthier climates than this. New Mexico is not considered the healthiest place in the world, and I've stood it down there for a good many years."

"Well, maybe you can stand Noo Mexico," said Faggott significantly, "an' that's ther place for you. Colorado

suddently develops into a bad climate fer those tenderfeet what come buttin' inter other people's business. Once more I say ter you, vamose! an' pretty derned quick."

"I shall not do anything of the sort," said Mr. Graham. "I am going to serve notice on you right now that you can't bluff me like you have a lot of cowards around this town. I'm going to stay."

"Then fix yer business affairs up an' say good-by ter yer family," said Faggott, with a scowl, and passed down the street.

"Say, pardner, that feller give you good advice," said a citizen of the town, who had overheard the conversation from the doorway of his store.

"It's not very good advice for me," said Mr. Graham. "I'm not built that way, and I come from a country where, when they tell you to get out, we generally stick that much harder."

"If it was me that Tom Faggott talked to that way, I'd sell out my business at ten cents on the dollar and hit the trail over the hills for a more saloobrious clime," said the storekeeper.

Mr. Graham turned away in disgust, and at once sought the office of the sheriff.

He found the official tilted back in his chair, looking moodily at the ceiling. He was not feeling very happy.

The sheriff knew that he was between two fires.

There was only one of two things to do, obey the order of the court and oust the Faggotts from the Santa Pieta Mine, or resign from his office of sheriff.

As a matter of fact, Sheriff Paxton was sheriff in name only. The real sheriff was Tom Faggott.

Paxton would no more dare serve any summons on a Faggott, or arrest one of that notorious band, than he would jump from the top of Pike's Peak.

So when Mr. Graham appeared, the sheriff was greatly put out.

"What are you going to do about these papers in the ouster proceedings against the Faggott brothers, Mr. Sheriff?" asked Mr. Graham.

"Nothing," answered the sheriff bruskly.

"Yes you are," said Mr. Graham. "You are either going to put them out of the mine and turn it over to me, or you are going to resign."

The sheriff was not built of very stiff material, and he began to whine.

"I can't go into that mine and turn those men out," he said. "They're my friends. Besides, their papers seem to be all right, and I'm not going to interfere in another man's business. I've seen too much of that sort of thing out here to want to try it. And I'd advise you to drop it and dig out of the country, because those boys will git you if you don't. They're bad medicine, those fellows are."

"Thank you," answered Mr. Graham. "They've already served notice on me to say good-by to my family, but I'm no coward. Now, you do one of two things, oust them from the mine to-morrow morning, or resign."

"Great guns! but you're hard on a fellow," said the sheriff. "You're almost as bad as the Faggotts themselves. They come here a-bluffin' me, and so do you."

"You're mistaken, Mr. Sheriff," said Mr. Graham seriously. "Before you are through with this you will find that I am not bluffing. I never bluffed in my life. I always get busy, and after it is all over I talk about it—perhaps."

"What shall I do? What shall I do?" whined the officer, getting up from his chair and pacing the room.

"If you haven't the nerve to go into that mine in the morning, resign."

"By gravy, I'll do it. I confess I haven't the nerve to go into the mine. Why, I've got five children——"

But Mr. Graham was gone.

CHAPTER II.

STELLA'S VIGILANCE COMMITTEE.

"What's the news?" asked Stella, when Mr. Graham entered the hotel after his interview with the sheriff.

"We've won in the court, but the sheriff vows he will resign before he goes into the mine to drive out the Faggotts and restore it to us," replied Mr. Graham.

"Let us give it up and go home," said Mrs. Graham.

"Not if I can prevent it," said Stella.

"Well, what are we going to do?" cried Mrs. Graham.

"We're in trouble enough," said Mr. Graham, "for if we cannot get an officer to execute the order of the court, you may be sure that the Faggotts will not walk out of their own free will."

"I have it," said Stella. "I'm going to organize a vigilance committee."

As she said this, Mr. Graham burst into laughter.

"You organize a vigilance committee!" he exclaimed. "Where are you going to get members for your committee?"

"There's hardly a decent man in this town who will not join it," said Stella.

"Very true, but who is going to lead it?"

"I am," answered the girl.

"Stella, do not be ridiculous," said her aunt. "The very idea of a young girl like you leading a vigilance committee against a band of rowdies like that."

"Never mind, Aunt Martha, you will find before I get through that I can do it. I only wish Ted Strong and the boys were here. They would know what to do."

"The very thing," cried Mr. Graham. "I wonder that I didn't think of it before."

"Where are they?" asked Mrs. Graham.

"I wouldn't be surprised if they were still in Denver," said Stella.

"Shall I telegraph Ted and ask him if they can come here?" asked Mr. Graham.

"By all means do so," said Mrs. Graham. "I shall feel safer when they are here."

Ted Strong and the boys were still at the Brown Palace Hotel, in Denver, and were making preparations to start for home the next day, when Ted received the telegram from Mr. Graham.

The telegram was as follows:

"A gang here has stolen Stella's mine, the Santa Pieta. She insists that we must recover it. Can you and the boys come and help us do it?"

As Ted read it he smiled. It seemed that wherever he turned there was work of the kind he liked to do.

"What do you think of this, fellows?" he called out. "Come in here and listen to this."

He was sitting in his room in the hotel, and in the adjoining rooms, which all opened into one another, were the other boys, engaged in packing their traps against their departure in the morning.

At his call they all came trooping into his room.

"What's ther trouble this time?" asked Bud Morgan.

"An uprising on the Pecos against the slanders of Bud Morgan," drawled Ben Tremont, referring to the stories, with which Bud occasionally regaled the boys, of alleged adventures in the Southwest. At this there was a guffaw.

"Thar'll be a uprisin' in Room 223 o' this yere hotel if I hear any more sich alludin' remarks," said Bud.

"Here's a telegram," interrupted Ted. "It is from Mr. Graham. It seems that they are in some sort of trouble at Mountain Springs, where they went for a rest and change."

"It's one o' them health resorts," said Bud. "I reckon it's ther ole story. Ther proprietor gets all ther change an' ther waiters gets ther rest."

"Wow!" said Ben. "That joke has long whiskers on it."

"I reckon so, but it applies, an' you're sore because you didn't think o' it fust."

"Let's have it," said Kit Summers.

Ted read the telegram.

"I can't make out what it's all about," he said. "I didn't know that Stella owned any mines anywhere, but it seems that she does, and that some one has stolen it, although I do not see how any one can carry off a mine."

"Vot a muscle must a man haf who can a mine steal," said Carl Schwartz.

"Almost as strong as Limburger cheese, eh, Dutch?" said Bud, who thought the world of the blond German boy, but could not resist teasing him when the occasion presented itself.

"Himmel!" exclaimed Carl. "Dere iss stronger dings as Limburger. Dere vos dose brown paper cigareets vot you smoke, made mit street sweepings vot you call tobacco, eh?"

The laugh was on Bud, who did make the vilest cigarettes of Mexican papers and tobacco, and he subsided.

"Well, fellows, what's the verdict?" asked Ted. "Shall we go?"

"Sure!"

The verdict came with a roar.

The boys were eager to find out what was being done at Mountain Springs, and particularly the contingent that had been at Moon Valley for several weeks attending to the cattle business, and had not been on an adventure with Ted for that length of time, until they were called to Denver to help Ted when he was the guard of the governor, when he was threatened at Scranton.

These were all eager for the fray, and they roared "Sure!" so loud that it caused the chandelier in the room to jangle.

"All right," said Ted. "But it is not necessary to be so enthusiastic. This is not a cow-camp or the Moon Valley ranch-house."

Then, just to show him that they were game, they shouted "Sure!" louder than ever.

"All right," said Ted. "Go as far as you like. I don't care as long as the police don't break in and take you all to the calaboose for a lot of rowdy cow-punchers. I'm going to answer this telegram by saying that we will be there on the morning train. Is that all right?"

"Sure!" came the reply. This time it rattled the windows, and there was a knock at the door.

Ted went and opened it.

"Who vas callin' feer Mr. Schuer?" asked a little man who stood in the doorway. "I vas lying down und I hear my name called, und I come. I am a treveling salesman, dry-goots und novelties, und I haf a dream dot somebody vants to puy someding, und den I hear my name. I vake oop kvick und hears it again, und here I am."

The boys laughed long and loud, and the mistake was explained to the traveling salesman, who went away very much disappointed.

"I told you you would get into trouble if you made so much noise," said Ted.

"Sure!" came the chorus, louder than ever.

"Oh, cut it out," said Ted, laughing in spite of himself, "or we'll all get a ride to the police station in the hoodlum wagon. I know you're glad to get out on an adventure again, but wait until you get down into the mountains to exercise your lungs."

This was answered with silence, and Ted wrote a telegram to Mr. Graham that they would all be on hand by noon of the next day.

When the young rough riders got off the train at Mountain Springs the next morning, they were met by Stella and Mr. Graham, and passed up-town through a group made up of the Faggotts and their friends.

Tom Faggott had somehow got information that they had been sent for, and he wanted to see what they looked like.

When he saw that they were boys he gave a big, coarse laugh just as Ted was passing him.

Ted turned red, for there was no mistaking Faggott's intention of insulting him.

Stepping quickly in front of him, Ted said:

"See here, you big loafer, are you laughing at me?"

Faggott stopped laughing and regarded Ted for a moment with an expression of amazement, which turned to contempt.

"Yes, I was laughing at you, my sporty young rooster, don't you like it?" he answered.

"I like it no more than I do you," said Ted hotly. "You are a big, overgrown bully, and I want to tell you right now that you can intimidate neither me nor any of my friends."

"Say, young fellow, do you know who I am?"

"No, I don't know who you are, and I care less. Only remember what I say, when you see me, mind your own business, or you'll get into trouble. I let no man insult me, without resenting it."

"Well, my name's Tom Faggott," said the bully, in a tone that meant "It is time for you to drop dead."

"You look more like a big, misshapen log than a faggot," said Ted, looking the bully over with unflattering eyes.

Several of the boys laughed as Ted said this, and Tom Faggott, enraged beyond endurance, sprang at Ted, but he was met by a blow on the chin that effectually stopped him, which was followed suddenly by the muzzle of a revolver thrust against his face.

All the boys had drawn their revolvers and had sprung to Ted's side.

"If you make a move, Faggott, I'll pull the trigger of this gun, and you know what will happen to you. Throw up your hands. Boys, keep those other fellows covered. Now, Mr. Faggott, I'll tell you who I am, so that you will know me when we meet again, and to show you that I am not in the least afraid of you. I am Ted Strong, and my friends here are the young rough riders. Perhaps

you have heard of us. If not, you will if you interfere with us again."

From the expression on Faggott's face, and the faces of his brothers and friends, they all had heard of Ted, and they backed off the station platform and walked up the street, talking among themselves. For the first time in their bullying careers, probably, they had been thoroughly bluffed, and they did not like it.

The news quickly spread through the town, and as the boys marched through the streets, to the hotel, escorting Stella and Mr. Graham, they were received with smiles and words of welcome by the good citizens, who had never heard before of such a thing as any one daring to defy the Faggotts, while at the same time they shook their heads in apprehension as to what would ultimately happen to Ted. They did not know that while Ted Strong, King of the Wild West, was apparently only a boy, and was so in years, he had a record of prowess behind him, and an experience that made him more than the equal of any of them, and that he was utterly fearless.

When they got to the hotel they all went into consultation in Mr. Graham's rooms, for Ted saw that now he had opened the war with Faggott, something must be done promptly.

"I am sorry we encountered the Faggotts so soon," said Mr. Graham.

"I am not," answered Ted. "We have shown them that we are not afraid of them, whoever they are. You see, I am not in the secret yet of why you asked us here. Have the Foggotts anything to do with it?"

"I forgot," said Mr. Graham, with a smile. "The Faggotts are the fellows who have stolen the mine."

"Then I am more than glad we met them, and that things turned out exactly as they did. If we are going to have trouble with them, sooner or later, it might as well begin at once. Tackling trouble at the beginning is the only way. If you let it wait, it grows bigger and bigger. I know now just the sort of a chap we will have to meet, and I believe that at heart he is something of a coward, and that his success has been largely on account of his size, his strength, and his reputation."

"Don't be too sure, Ted," said Stella. "He is a bad man, and we must not rely on the fact that he is not as brave as some others."

"But now what are we to do?" asked Ted.

"Stella had a plan to organize a vigilance committee, but when she tried to do so she couldn't get a single recruit in the town. What do you think of that? The peaceable people of the town are in sympathy with us, but they are mortally afraid of the Faggott gang, which has bullied them so long that their control seems permanent."

"Yes, and the sheriff resigned when it came to the point when he must obey the court's injunction to oust the Faggotts from the Santa Pieta Mine," cried Stella.

"Ah, that gives me an idea," said Ted.

"That's what we need," said Mr. Graham.

"What's the reason we couldn't go before the court and have one of us appointed sheriff, temporarily, to protect our interests and effect the order of the court?" said Ted.

"The very thing," said Mr. Graham. "I knew that when you boys got here we should begin to see our way clearer."

"And I have another idea," cried Stella. "Why shouldn't I have my vigilance committee, after all? If you boys will join it, the thing is done. Will you become members of the Mountain Springs Protective Association, for the restoration of peace and the driving out of the Faggott gang?"

"We will!" shouted the boys.

That settled the matter, and Stella's vigilance committee was an assured fact.

CHAPTER III.

THE SHOT THROUGH THE WINDOW

Ted and Mr. Graham went to the court and presented the case to the judge. They showed him that the sheriff having resigned, it was desirable that one of their own party should be vested with the powers of the sheriff, until they could enforce the order of the court, and compel the Faggotts to heed the law.

The judge listened to them, and then very promptly came to a decision.

"Young man," he said, turning to Ted, "I have heard of you in connection with your excellent work during the Leadville strike, and in the capture of the dynamiters at Scranton, and I know that you have the courage and force of character to carry out the duties of a sheriff, even if you are somwhat young for the office."

"I am a deputy United States marshal," said Ted.

"Then I guess you are capable of being the sheriff of this county until you have enforced the orders of this court."

Ted had thought that the court would appoint Mr. Graham to the office, and that he and the boys would work under him as deputies, and he now suggested that the judge arrange it in that way.

"No, I do not care to take the office," said Mr. Graham. "My wife is very timid, and I know she would worry greatly if I was made sheriff. The judge knows more about these things than you or I, Ted."

"All right," said Ted. "Of course I didn't mean to question the court's judgment in the matter, but I thought, perhaps, an older man might be better in the place."

"You'll do," said the judge, smiling kindly at Ted. "Only carry out the court's orders, and if the men who have stolen the mine resist, or commit any acts of violence, arrest them and bring them before this court, and they will be taken care of. I have imposed a great responsibility on you, young man, but I am confident that you are equal to it. You are to act as sheriff only in the case of the Santa Pieta Mine, however, and the court will not call on you for any other service—unless it has to."

With this injunction ringing in his ears, the young sheriff left the court-room, and in less than five minutes it was known all over town that a boy had been put in the place vacated by Sheriff Paxton, because the latter did not have the courage to put the trespassers out of the mine.

The news caused a good deal of merriment when it was known that a band of boys was to tackle the Faggott gang.

However, the laughter was tempered by the memory that Ted had already met and stopped the bully, and the population sat back to see what would happen.

"Boys," said Mr. Graham, when he and Ted had re-

turned to the hotel, with the news that Ted had been appointed sheriff, "I have an idea that we should move away from the hotel. It is too public for us, and we cannot discuss our plans without there being a danger that they will be overheard.

"I wanted to tell you that I have engaged a log cabin for us. There is a big room, which you boys can occupy as barracks, and there are living-rooms for the rest of us. What do you say?"

"That's the idea," said Ted. "We ought to get out of the town, anyway, if we are to keep track of the movements of the Faggott gang. We are not going to have any snap getting rid of those fellows."

"Surest thing yer know," said Bud Morgan. "That gang is plumb pizen. If we git thet mine it'll hev ter be dug outer them fellers with bullets and perseverance."

They moved out to the cabin that afternoon.

It was a large log structure, built by the former owner of the Santa Pieta Mine, and lay about midway between Mountain Springs and the mine.

It was on the side of the mountain, and one standing on the veranda could look down into the town; and, with a pair of field-glasses, could see the mouth of the mine.

It suited the boys to a dot, as it had been left with its bunks and furniture intact by its owner when he left for the East.

In the big room, which was to be the barracks for the boys, there was a row of bunks down one side, and they soon built others, so that every fellow had one for himself. With their blankets they made first-rate beds for the boys; just the kind they liked, for they were more used to a camp bed than the sort they had been sleeping on in the hotel, which were a trifle too fancy and delicate for a lot of cow-punchers. Or so they told themselves, but Mrs. Graham, who was an old-fashioned housekeeper, objected because they did not have fresh sheets and pillow-cases.

"You want to make us soft, Mrs. Graham," said Ted. "But these fellows have slept on the ground, with the sand for a mattress and their saddles for pillows, too long to care anything too much for sheets, which are for ladies and children."

Mrs. Graham laughed, and let them have their own way. But she did object when Stella declared her intention of having a bunk in her own room, instead of the bedstead with which it was furnished, and of sleeping in blankets instead of sheets.

"You'll do nothing of the sort, young woman," said Mrs. Graham, with decision. "You're not a boy, and I won't have you get any such foolish notions into your head."

"But I am the leader of the vigilance committee, and I am not entitled to any better than my men," said she.

"You are right, Stella," said her uncle. "Martha, let her have her own way. It will be good for her."

So Mrs. Graham yielded, but not without much grumbling at the manner in which young girls had their own way in these days.

But Stella was right. She was accustoming herself to endure hardships, or at least get used to doing without luxuries, for she knew that there might be many nights in camp in store for her where she would have to get along without sheets, and, sometimes, even without blankets.

As soon as they got settled in their cabin, which was not until the next day, Ted and the boys went before the judge, who, at Ted's request, swore them all in as the sheriff's deputies, and they became members of the King of the Wild West's posse.

The judge looked them over after he had administered the oath, and nodded his head with satisfaction.

"You have a fine posse, Sheriff Strong," he said. "With that you ought to win."

"That is what we intend to do, your honor," Ted replied, flushing at the title the judge had given him.

When the new deputy sheriffs were all out of the court-room they began to joke Ted about it.

"Make way for the new sheriff," said Ben Tremont, stepping out in front and marching like a drum major.

"When do we begin shuriffing, please Mr. Shuriff?" asked Bud.

"What do you do when you sheriff, anyway?" said Kit.

"Iss a shuf a greater man yet as der kaiser?" asked Carl innocently.

"See here, you fellows quit your kidding," said Ted, laughing. "You'll soon know all about it, and you will find that 'sheriffing' is no small job, either."

That night the war with the Faggotts and the disorderly element in the county began. It came sooner than Ted expected, but it did not surprise him, for the lawless element saw that both Ted and the court meant business, and, as far as they were concerned, it meant that Ted and the boys must be driven out of the county, or they themselves would be eliminated.

As Mr. Graham and his wife and Stella were in their sitting-room, about nine o'clock that night, there was a step on the veranda.

Stella heard it and looked up, but as she did not hear it again she thought possibly it might be the wind, which had risen, rattling the door.

The boys were in their barracks, arranging their effects in the most comfortable manner.

Suddenly there was a crash and a scream.

It was a rifle-shot from the veranda, and, without a moment's hesitation, Ted threw himself out of the window, which opened upon the veranda, in time to see a man leap to the ground and rush down the terrace that arose from the road, and on which the house was built.

Ted dashed after him, pulling out his .44 as he ran, but before he got to the road the man had disappeared in the darkness, and, although Ted searched about for several minutes, he could get no trace of him.

Ted hurried back to the house to see what damage had been done, and found the boys in Mr. Graham's sitting-room.

Big Ben Tremont was trying to quiet Mrs. Graham, who was hysterical from fright, while Bud and Kit were with Mr. Graham, whose coat was off. They were trying to stanch the blood which flowed from a wound in his shoulder.

A dastardly shot had been fired at Mr. Graham through the window, in an attempt to assassinate him.

But the ball had only passed through the fleshy part of the shoulder.

After the excitement had died down, Ted went out on the porch and sighted through the hole in the window at Mr. Graham, after the latter had seated himself in the exact position he had been in when the shot was fired.

Without doubt, the shot had been intended for his head, but he was sitting just a trifle too far to the right for

the assassin to get a good aim at his head with a rifle. His arm struck the side of the window-casing. This was the only thing that saved his life. By experimenting further, Ted found that if the would-be murderer had used a revolver, of heavy caliber, he could, undoubtedly, have killed Mr. Graham.

"If that is to be their mode of warfare," said Ted, "we have got to guard against a repetition of it. Hereafter we will have a night guard."

Mr. Graham's wound was soon dressed by Ted, who was an expert at the dressing of wounds, for it did not need the services of a surgeon, the ball having passed clear through the flesh.

Mrs. Graham was greatly frightened by the occurrence, but Ted soon quieted her by assuring her that it would not occur again.

She wanted to throw up the whole thing, relinquish the mine, and start for New Mexico at once.

"We cannot do that," said Ted. "We have gone into court over it, and we have sworn to carry out the order of the court in restoring the mine to Stella and Mr. Graham."

"You are right," said Mr. Graham. "This is nothing except a mere flesh-wound, and it will teach us to be more careful in the future. At the same time, it has revealed to us the desperate character of these villains. No, we will stay here and see it through."

Little Mrs. Graham saw the logic of Ted's and her husband's words, and tearfully assented.

"I'll take the first watch myself," said Ted, when the Grahams had retired, and the boys were back in their barracks. "I want to get the hang of the outside of the house at night. I feel confident that that band of cowards will try this thing again, and I want to study the situation so that we will catch the assassin the next time it is attempted."

Ted watched nearly all night, but there was no repetition of the assault upon the house. But he had studied the situation thoroughly, and he knew that such another attack could not be made without its being discovered in time to prevent it, even if they did not catch the man in the act.

The next day Mr. Graham's arm was sore, but healing rapidly.

Ted had given the boys instructions to say nothing in the town about the attempted assassination of Mr. Graham, and he and several of them were seen in the town by members of the Faggott gang, and as they were perfectly calm, the ruffians knew that their purpose had failed, and that Mr. Graham had not been killed. They were also aware that a doctor had not been called to the cabin, and that if he had been wounded, it was not seriously.

This gave them a setback, for they had planned to kill him first, and then eliminate the rest of the party as fast as they could.

Ted would not permit the boys to go into the town, or even far from the house, unless there were two or three in the party, and the house was never left unguarded.

When Stella and her aunt went to town, they were always accompanied by a body-guard of at least six of the boys, who, apparently, were not on guard duty at all, but only along because they were part of the family.

The day after the shot through the window, Ted and Mr. Graham stayed in the house, concocting their campaign against the Faggotts, and, while they laid out a beautiful plan, it was all knocked to pieces by the circumstances that followed.

Then Mr. Graham, whose arm had healed so that he could put on his coat without pain, was seen on the streets, as if nothing had happened to him, to the mystification of the Faggotts.

They were then convinced that the attempt at assassination had been a complete failure.

CHAPTER IV.

TED ON A LONE SCOUT.

Work had stopped in the Santa Pieta Mine.

Ted had watched it from the cabin, and had observed that, for several days, no one had been going in or coming out.

This did not argue, however, that it was deserted.

Ted did not believe that the Faggotts had gone away and left the mine.

Its apparent desertion was probably a trap, and Ted was too good a campaigner to fall into it.

He believed that the entrance to the mine was well guarded, and that any attempt to take it by force would result disastrously.

He did not propose to sacrifice his friends and comrades to the Faggotts.

He felt sure that the Faggotts had planned an ambuscade for them to fall into, and that if they rushed into it they would be defeated.

With this idea in his mind, he determined to go on a "lone scout," and find out for himself the exact state of affairs at the mine before leading the boys to an attack.

He confided his purpose to Bud, who looked at him dubiously for a moment.

"Will you never git over goin' out on these yere scoutin' expyditions by yer lonesome?" asked the old cow-puncher. "Some o' these days ye'll git it in ther neck, an' no one nigh ter help yer out."

"Bud, you're a croaker," said Ted. "You've been crying that at me for a long time, but you see I always turn up safe."

"You bet you do, but after all o' us go out an' bring yer back. Ted, you've got too much nerve."

"That's all right," laughed Ted. "You know I'm right about this. Those fellows are aching for us to rush into that mine. Nothing would suit them better."

"I reckon yer plumb right, Ted," said Bud. "If we wuz ter go in thar an' try ter capcher it by force, we'd jest about be mowed down by their rifles."

"I know it, and I want to see if we cannot win it some other way."

"What's yer scheme?"

"Bud, I don't want any one, except you, to know what I'm going to do. There is no use of worrying the others. I'm going to find my way into that mine if I can."

"An' what do yer want me to do?"

"See that the watch is kept every night, and that Mrs. Graham and Stella are properly guarded."

"Air ye afraid fer them?"

"I am, Bud. There are two propositions here. We have to guard against them both."

"An' ther fust is?"

"The women. The Faggotts, when they find they cannot strike us in any other way, will try to do it through the weakest part of us."

"Hold on, Ted. You wouldn't call Stella one o' ther weakest parts o' ther posse, would yer?"

Ted laughed. He knew that Bud was right.

"Well, no," he replied. "Under ordinary circumstances she is well able to take care of herself, but the situation which confronts us now is not ordinary."

"Surest thing yer know, pard," answered Bud earnestly.

"You know, from past experiences, that a gang like that is surest to attack us on what they think is the weakest spot."

"And that is ther wimmen folks! Of course I know."

"They must be guarded carefully. You know what happened in Denver. Scoundrels of the sort we have to contend with will stop at nothing."

"I'll watch 'em every minnit."

"Then the second proposition that is before us, is how to get into the mine."

"I see thet ther work hez stopped at ther mine."

"You observed that, also?"

"I shore did. An' I got next ter something else."

"What was that, Bud?"

"I wuz on guard last night, an' I see through the field-glasses thet they handed a wagon-load of provisions inter ther mine durin' ther night."

"That is exactly what I had suspected. Now you see what I mean by the second danger."

"Ther mine is full o' men."

"Exactly!"

"An' you think thet it is a wise game ter go inter it, under those succumstances?"

"Great Scott, Bud, we've got to find out what is in there, and the way they have defended the mine."

"Shore fer yer, but what's ther use o' riskin' a life ter find out?"

"Bud, I've trailed an' camped and punched cows with you a long time, and I never knew you to talk so foolishly before. We've simply got to know the lay of the land before we attack that mine."

"All right, Mr. Sheriff, go on an' git shot up if you like. But let me know if yer git inter trouble."

"Don't worry, Bud, I'll come out all right."

"*Adios.* I'll take care o' ther wimmen, but send me a message when yer need me."

Ted knew that it was generalship, as well as courage, that was going to win this fight with the Faggotts.

They were too strong to attack openly, for Tom Faggott had the whole lawless element with him, and could muster an army of miners out of work, who had been drinking his whisky at his "blind tigers," and whom he had been feeding, probably, in anticipation of this very thing.

How was the mine defended? How could it be most easily won?

These were the problems before the King of the Wild West now, and it was his duty to solve them.

Besides, he was now vested with the powers of a sheriff, and he had certain duties to perform that he might have shirked, had he gone into it as a mere citizen.

The judge of the court which had given Stella back her mine expected him to perform his duties, and if he did not do so would hold him to account.

Of course Ted was perfectly aware of the danger of his proposed visit to the mine.

He had been in danger before, and this part of the transaction did not bother him much. He wanted to find out how he could get his boys into the mine, and drive the thieves out.

Ted was lightly "hooked up," as the phrase goes in the West, when he started out after his interview with Bud.

That is to say, he had stripped himself down to his gray flannel shirt, his khaki trousers and leggings, and his hat and boots. He did not want to carry any extra weight.

For convenience and lightness, he had discarded his heavy cartridge-belt, and carried his revolver inside the waistband of his trousers, in front, where he could get at it instantly.

In his pockets were three extra rounds of cartridges, which he believed would carry him through.

If they didn't, then he would have to fight in some manner other than with his revolver.

But he did not think that he would have to fight at all.

It was a question of strategy with him this trip.

Later it might be a matter of fight. But just now he wanted to know what the situation was at the mine.

From where he was standing he could see the entrance to the mine.

He saw a man on guard. He was not pacing, as a sentinel, but, occasionally, he came out from a hiding-place among the rocks that flanked the entrance to the mine, and looked around.

That was enough for Ted. He saw that he could not approach the entrance to the mine without being shot.

In all likelihood, the man on guard was one of the Faggott brothers, who knew him well by sight, and probably hated him cordially, and, finding him alone, would shoot him without compunction, and, in fact, with a great deal of pleasure.

The direct approach to the mine being, therefore, not advisable, Ted scouted the hills, keeping well out of sight of the entrance to the mine.

He thought that, perhaps, somewhere back in the hills he might find another shaft, less well guarded, by which he might enter it.

He passed around the only road that led to the mine entrance, and was soon in the hills.

The way was very difficult, owing to the scattered rocks and boulders.

Ted soon found that he had to travel with the greatest caution, because there were guards everywhere.

The Faggotts had stationed men all about the mine to guard it from surprise.

Evidently they took the situation more seriously than Ted thought they would.

As Ted crept forward cautiously, he figured the situation out.

The entrance to the mine faced toward the west.

Below it was the Fenton Valley, in which the town of Mountain Springs was situated.

Behind it was Prospect Mountain.

The guards, which Tom Faggott had set, patrolled a way that led around the mountain from the mouth of the mine.

Ted, in his course away from the mouth of the mine, soon discovered that there must be several entrances to the mine itself, or that there was only one other than the one by which the miners entered and the ore came out.

The guards that he saw, as he scouted around the side

of the mountain, were there evidently to stop any attempt to survey the ground.

Evidently all had become so accustomed to their work that they were not as watchful as they should have been, for he slipped past one after another.

He was creeping carefully among the rocks away from where he had seen a guard, upon whom he had almost stumbled, when he raised up to look into the barrel of a Colt .44.

Behind it was the smiling face of a man whom he recognized as one of the Faggotts.

The smile behind the gun was not one of mirth or satisfaction. It was as devilishly cruel as anything Ted had ever seen.

He had been captured, hands down.

"Throw up your hands!" said the man.

Ted's mind was working with lightning rapidity.

This was no time for him to be captured. If he were to drop out of the fight at this time, the whole scheme which he had planned would go to pieces.

But here he was looking into the barrel of a .44.

This seemed to mean business.

Would it pay to chance it?

With a light spring he answered his own thought. In an instant he was upon the man with the revolver.

He heard the hammer fall, and in that brief fraction expected to hear the weapon crash out and feel the ball enter his body, and, perhaps, kill him.

But there was no report. The hammer had fallen upon a bad cartridge. Instantly he was upon his assailant, and had knocked the revolver from his hand.

Then the fight began.

The man upon whom Ted had jumped was all of six feet tall, and as active and lithe as a panther.

But Ted met him at every turn, and, together, they wrestled silently down the rocky slope of the mountain.

Ted's adversary was a man of wonderful strength, but he was neither so young nor so active as Ted, for he appeared to be muscle-bound, as Ted threw him this way and that, resisting him at every wrench.

But at last they came to the danger-point, where, if either of them was thrown, it meant death.

They were on a sort of shelving plateau, and over the edge lay a rocky ravine, a hundred feet deep, with a perpendicular wall.

Still they kept struggling, for neither could give up now.

Suddenly Ted remembered a trick Bud had taught him, and put it into execution.

It was a sudden wrench to the side, then a backward throw that would bend the spine, and the heel behind the foot of his adversary, that was in the rear.

It was successful. He felt Faggott going. With a quick jerk Ted released himself, at the same time throwing his enemy from him, and he fell upon the rocks and began to roll toward the brink. He had been stunned by the concussion of his head with the rocks, and was helpless.

In another moment he would have been over the edge, and have been dashed to death upon the rocks at the bottom of the ravine.

But, tired and breathless as he was, Ted leaped forward, caught him and dragged him back to safety.

It was an act worthy of Ted Strong.

He could conquer an enemy in a fair fight, but could not see him go to death in that manner.

When he had dragged Faggott to a safe distance from the edge of the chiff, Ted bound him, hand and foot—and left him.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT TED FOUND.

Ted Strong at once climbed back up the hill, down which he and the particular Faggott, whose name he did not know and whom he could not distinguish, had wrestled, until he came to the place where he had discovered his vanquished enemy.

He had an idea that somewhere about here was something that the Faggotts wished to conceal.

What if it were another opening to the Santa Pieta Mine? This was entirely possible.

Many of the mines in Colorado have shafts that are cut in to meet one another, so permitting the operators to work more than one shift of men, and so make their property more valuable.

As Ted thought this possibility over, the more convinced he became that it was true.

That was why Tom Faggott had placed a cordon of pickets around the mountainside.

He had shrewdly guessed that Ted would know that the mouth would be guarded, and would not attack it openly, but that he would seek another entrance.

But he did not believe that any one could get by his pickets, nor that finding such a sturdy one as his younger brother Jack, could defeat him.

Again Tom Faggott had not rightly estimated Ted Strong.

Ted climbed rapidly to the top of the slope, and looked about him. There was no opening, that he could discover, in the side of the mountain, and he wondered why the Faggotts should take the trouble to guard the place.

Perhaps it was beyond—this other entrance to the Santa Pieta Mine.

He wished Mr. Graham had known more about the mine himself. It would have saved Ted a lot of trouble.

As he was wandering along the mountainside, looking on every hand for an opening, he suddenly heard the sounds of feet on the rocky path, and had only time to conceal himself behind a ledge of rock when Tom Faggott himself came along, followed by two of his fellows. They were talking in a loud tone, and Ted heard Faggott say:

"We've got that brat, Ted Strong, beaten at every point. It makes me laugh to think that he has been made sheriff. If he had the whole State of Colorado behind him, he couldn't get into the mine, the way we have it guarded now."

"You bet he couldn't." was the answer, shouted back, as they passed on down the mountain. "The only way would be through the back door."

"They'll never find that," said Tom Faggott. "Not with all the guards we've put on the mountain. Every one's got orders to shoot to kill when they see Ted Strong."

"That's pleasant news," thought Ted to himself, as they passed out of sight and earshot.

If Tom Faggott was to pass along the way where his brother had been on guard, he could not but notice his absence, and it would not take much searching to discover him, bound hand and foot, on the edge of the cliff.

In that event, there would, of course, be a general search made for Ted, and with the force that Tom Faggott had at his command, it was more than likely that he would be found.

It was, therefore, imperative for him to find this "back door" to the mine, which one of the passing Faggott men had spoken about.

Ted knew now that it existed. There was no doubt about it, and Ted was sure that it was somewhere in the immediate neighborhood.

He left his hiding-place quickly, and ran along the shelving side of the mountain.

He had not run more than a hundred yards when he almost fell headlong into a hole in the side of the mountain.

It was, apparently, an old shaft opening that had been abandoned years before.

As a matter of fact, that is what it was—the first shaft of the Santa Pieta Mine, through which the ore had been painfully dragged upward until the miners had dug through to the other mouth farther down the mountainside, facing upon the valley. As he caught himself, Ted breathed a sigh of relief that he had not fallen into it.

He approached the edge carefully and gazed into the depths, and was relieved to find a ladder.

In a moment he was upon it, and descending.

He did not know how far down the ladder would take him. He knew that often, in these deserted shafts, the ladders stopped suddenly. Often they had rotted away, but sometimes they had been removed, to be used elsewhere.

It would not be a pleasant matter, therefore, to suddenly step off into space and fall a hundred feet, or more, for he had no idea how deep the shaft might be.

Often, in descending mine ladders, Ted had had this thought, and it always had sent a cold shiver over him.

Every one knows the horrible sensation that creeps over one at the prospect of falling, and which possesses him when looking from a height. Every one is not afflicted with it, but it was one of Ted's weaknesses, if it is a weakness. So as Ted looked into the abyss below him, he felt this emotion coming over him.

What if he should fall?

A shudder passed through his body, and he hesitated a moment. He could not see the bottom, on account of the darkness.

But he immediately plucked up courage.

He could not go back again. He must continue down.

He was going down the ladder rapidly, handing his way along as fast as he could.

He did not know whether he was a hundred feet from the bottom, or fifty.

Suddenly his foot missed a rung, his hands were jerked from their hold, and he began to fall. The ladder had ceased to exist.

A thrill of horror shot through him. The thing that he had always dreaded had happened.

He suppressed a cry of terror, and——

The next moment he alighted safe and sound. He had fallen about four feet. A few of the rungs of the ladder had been knocked off at the bottom.

When he felt himself secure again, he laughed softly. "That's the way with fear," he muttered to himself. "I never felt fear yet but I found that it was useless. Fear is a phantom. It should not exist in a healthy mind."

But he did not give much time to reflections of this sort. It was his present business to find his way through the mine, and discover, if possible, how the Faggotts had barricaded it, and the best way to lead the boys into it.

It was dark at the level at which he was, but in his hip pocket he carried his electric search-light, and with that was able to guide himself through the labyrinthine tunnels in which he found himself.

Evidently this part of the mine had not been in operation for a long time.

As he was groping his way along, he almost fell into a pit, and staggered back just in time. The edge had crumbled under his heel, and had he not thrown himself on his back he would have fallen into it.

As soon as he was on his feet again he threw his search-light into it, and discovered that it was only another level which had been worked out and abandoned.

But as he was looking into it a strange thing happened.

Hearing a low, frightened moan, he looked into one corner of the pit, and saw two bright points of light. That they were eyes there could be no doubt, but whether of man or animal he could not tell.

But the more he looked, the more he believed that he was looking into the eyes of a man.

All he could see was a huddled black mass with the two points of light shining out of it.

At last he recovered somewhat from his surprise, and called to the shining eyes:

"Hello! if you are a man, answer me. What are you doing there?"

Instantly the huddled black mass rose up, and it was a man. It approached slowly.

"Didn't you know I was here?" said a strange, hollow voice.

"No, how should I know?" answered Ted.

"Then you're not one of the Faggotts?" again asked the voice, which was so full of horror and despair that it made Ted shudder.

"I certainly am not," said Ted, in a kindly tone.

He saw it all in a minute. Here was a prisoner of the Faggott gang. It was in this manner that they punished their enemies, by burying them in the blackness of the mine.

"Thank Heaven that some one has found me at last," said the voice fervently.

"Who are you, and how did you come to be here?" asked Ted.

"My name is Charles Redmond," was the answer. "I was superintendent of this mine, but the Faggotts caught me and put me here, and have tried to starve me to death, but——"

"Well?" asked Ted, when the man hesitated.

"Who are you?" asked the man suspiciously. "How do I know that you are not one of the Faggotts, come here to find out how I have managed to live so long, and then to shut me off from my supplies."

So this was the missing Redmond. Ted was sorrier than he could say for the poor fellow, who had endured there was no knowing how much misery in this dark and silent prison. And how he had managed to live here so long was a mystery.

"I am Ted Strong, a friend of Mr. Graham; you know him, don't you?" said Ted.

A cry came from the prisoner at the bottom of the pit that wrung Ted's heart, it was so full of relief and joy.

"Mr. Graham? Is he here?" cried the prisoner.

"He is," answered Ted, "and I am his representative. I have come to save you."

"How did you know I was here?" asked Redmond suspiciously.

"I didn't know you were here until I found you," answered Ted. "We all thought you were dead. I came here looking for another way into the mine, but now that I have found you, I shall try to get you out."

"If I could only believe you," wailed the voice. "They have all lied to me so many times. They have come to me with promises of food and then gone away laughing. I suppose you will do the same."

"Not I," said Ted. "Come, to prove that I mean what I say, how shall I get you out here?"

"I am afraid to tell you," said Redmond.

"Why?"

"If I do, when a true rescuer comes along my only hope will be gone," was the answer.

"I wish I could prove to you that I am your friend, and the enemy of the Faggotts," said Ted. "How have you managed to live while you have been in that hole?"

"I have caught rats, and water comes in through the cracks in the walls, and I have managed to gather enough to keep from dying. Oh, don't stay and torture me if you are a man. If you are a Faggott you may as well go away, for I will never tell you where the big lead of gold is. I told you that long ago. The secret does not belong to you, but to the rightful owners of the mine."

Here was the secret of the imprisonment of poor Redmond. There was a rich gold lead in the mine. Redmond would not reveal it, and he was being slowly tortured by hunger and thirst until he would tell. And this, too, was the reason why he had been imprisoned.

"If what I say doesn't sound honest to you," said Ted, "then I can do no more than go back again and come with ropes or a ladder and get you out. I wish you would believe me."

"I believe you," said Redmond, after a moment. "If you will go down the passage to your right you will find a hollow in the rock about fifty feet from here. In it you will find a rope. Get it and throw it over to me and I will climb out. But if you betray me I will die here, for it is my only chance of ever escaping."

Ted hurried away to find the rope. His heart bled for the poor prisoner of the mine. Soon he found the rope where Redmond had said it was, and threw the end of it over the side of the pit.

Redmond was so weak that Ted had to drag him to the top, and without further delay they started to climb to the top of the ladder.

They managed to elude the Faggott pickets, and finally arrived at the log cabin.

"What would you like most in all the world to eat?" said Ted, as he took the famished man into the house.

"All the ham and eggs there is in the country," was the reply.

Before his hunger was satisfied he had eaten all the food in the cabin, and that was considerable.

CHAPTER VI.

"TO-DAY YOU DIE."

Redmond was so exhausted by his terrible experiences in the mine that it was several days before he recovered. Ted let him rest, and the Grahams fed him until at last he was more like his old self.

Then Ted took him in hand and questioned him about the plan of the mine, and the best way to get into it and drive the Faggotts out, and take possession of it.

"I want to do it without bloodshed if possible," said Ted, "and I think it can be done."

"I can lead you through the mine, if that is what you want," said Redmond, "but as for driving them out without fighting for it I am not so sure. The Faggotts are fighters when they want anything."

"Well, we can try it," said Ted. "and if they insist upon a fight I suppose we can give them one."

"When do you want to go in?"

"Whenever is best. I suppose they have it heavily guarded, and that the easiest time to take it is when the Faggotts are not there."

"The Faggotts live in the mine, and some of them are there all the time."

"I had thought as much. We must do a little spying on them and attack them when they are weakest. Then we will hold it ourselves."

"I tell you, Mr. Strong, you'll never make a success of it that way. You'll have to drive the fellows from the country."

"But I have no authority to do that. If I could fasten some crime on them that would justify their being sent to the penitentiary that would be another matter."

"They will do enough for that before this thing is over," said Redmond, with conviction; and there the conversation stopped, and Ted went away to talk it over with Mr. Graham and the boys.

He found them all except Bud and Ben, who had gone into town after the mail.

While they were talking these two burst into the cabin in a state of great excitement.

"What's up?" asked Ted.

"There's goin' ter be somethin' doin' fer us, sheriff," said Bud.

"It certainly looks that way," said Ben.

"Well, let us have the news," said Ted. "That's what we're here for."

"When we were at the post-office we met the judge. He seemed to be greatly excited and nervous, and when he saw us he asked us to come to the court-house, as he wanted to talk to us," said Ben.

"He wanted ter see you, but you not bein' thar he reckoned we'd do," put in Bud.

"Well?"

"When we got to the court-house he took us into his private office, chambers they call them, and locked the door," said Ben, taking up the narrative. "Then he threw a paper on the table and told us to read it."

"What was it?"

"Here it is. Read it for yourself."

Ben handed Ted a scrap of dirty paper on which was scrawled with a piece of charcoal these words:

"To-day you die."

"That's to the point," said Ted, when he had read the words aloud. "Where did he get it?"

"It was found in the hall of his house this morning," said Ben. "It had been slipped under the door some time during the night."

"What does he think of it?"

"He believes it to be a threat from the Faggotts in retaliation for giving the decision in the mine case to Mr. Graham, and making us deputy sheriffs to enforce the order."

"Does he think the threat will be carried out?"

"He is greatly worried, for he knows the desperate character of the men who have taken this means to be revenged."

"Well, he has pretty good judgment, and if he is worried about it, then it is time for us to go to him and protect him. We cannot permit him to suffer in our cause."

The boys hurriedly armed themselves preparatory to going into town.

It was Ted's intention to go immediately to the court-house and remain with the judge and escort him to his home, and leave some of the boys there to guard him.

But it would need the whole force if the Faggotts were to start a fight, either in the court-room or on the street, and it would not do to leave Stella and Mrs. Graham alone in the cabin, which was entirely unprotected. Therefore, he suggested that the ladies permit themselves to be taken to the hotel until it was safe to go back to the cabin.

Mrs. Graham eagerly consented to this, but Stella would not go to the hotel.

"This is my vigilance committee," she said, "and I'm going to stick to them."

"This work that we're going on now is not that of the vigilance committee, but of the sheriff and his posse," said Ted. "Later on I'll turn the committee over to you, not to-day."

"Well, anyhow, I'm going. You will have to make me a deputy, Mr. Sheriff, or I'll get the judge to do it."

When Stella made up her mind to do a thing she generally did it, and Ted, seeing that it would do no good to argue the matter with her, laughingly appointed her one of his deputies.

All hands set out at once for the town, and the boys left Mrs. Graham at the hotel, where she would be safe.

They proceeded immediately to the court-house and to the judge's chambers, as the court was not in session.

Ted knocked on the door, and, receiving no response, opened it and entered. The judge was not there.

A piece of paper was lying on the desk and Ted read thereon:

"Have gone home. Will not return to-day."

It was written in the judge's hand, which Ted knew well. But below it was other writing which was not the judge's. It was crabbed and illiterate. It was:

"Nor to-morrow, or ever again."

"Boys, I'm afraid we're too late," said Ted. "The judge has gone home, and some enemy has beaten us here, and evidently followed him to his house. We must hurry there as fast as we can."

The judge's house was among the hills at the extreme end of the town, and there the boys hurried.

When they got within sight of the house they saw that the front door stood wide open.

"Hurry, fellows!" shouted Ted, dashing forward. "They are here before us."

Ted was the first into the hall, and there he saw evidences of a struggle. The chairs were overturned and the rugs out of their accustomed places.

But where was the judge?

Hurriedly the boys searched the lower rooms of the house. They were deserted.

"He must be up-stairs," said Ted.

Up they went three steps at a time, and went through room after room, but did not find the judge.

In a large back room on the first floor, which seemed to be the judge's study, Ted found the furniture knocked about and the room in a terrible state of confusion.

But he could not find the judge.

The judge was a widower, and lived in the house with several servants.

What had become of them?

After they had searched the upper part of the house thoroughly they went to the lower floor again, and went through the cellar.

Still they could find no one.

"It is very strange that we cannot find the servants," said Mr. Graham.

"Not at all," said Ted. "They are hiding somewhere about the place, but they are too frightened to come out. They probably hear us, but think we are the gang that has attacked the house and either murdered or carried off the judge. I incline to the former plot. If we could find the servants we could get at the bottom of it at once. Evidently there has been a fight."

"Surest thing yer know," said Bud Morgan, "an' ther jedge must have put up a pretty stiff battle from ther signs I see."

"Let us search the grounds," said Ted. "The servants may be hiding there."

Back of the house was a barn, the door of which stood open. It had stalls for several horses, but there were none there now, although there were evidences that the stalls had been recently occupied.

"The Faggotts have added horse-stealing to their other accomplishments," said Ted. "When they left they probably thought that it would be a shame to leave good horses to go to waste."

"Ther jedge hed some good horses," said Bud. "If I am any jedge o' hoss-flesh, what I see him drivin' this mornin' would take ther eye o' a feller like thet Tom Faggott."

Ted saw that there was no one concealed in the barn, and went out into the grounds.

The house was far remote from every other, and built against the side of the mountain.

Back of it Ted saw a wooden door set in the rock.

"There's a cellar behind that door," he thought. "And we'll find something there sure."

He walked to the door and tried to open it, but it would not come open, although it was made to lock from the outside.

Bracing himself, he pulled with all his strength, and it flew open with a suddenness that almost threw him on his back, and with it came a little old man.

"Oh, please, don't hurt me," the little man cried.

"I'm not a robber," said Ted. "Come, who are you?"

"I'm Jenkins, sir," said the man. "I'm the judge's man of all work."

"Where are the other servants?"

"They're in here, sir, hiding from the robbers."

"Well, have them out and into the house. I want to ask them some questions."

Jenkins called to the others who were hiding in the cellar, and they came out, very much frightened, and followed Ted into the house, where the others had gone to make another search. When they were all together, Ted proceeded to question Jenkins as to what had taken place.

"Where is the judge?" asked Ted.

"He was killed or taken away by a band of robbers," answered Jenkins, in a trembling voice.

The other servants—an elderly woman, Mrs. Swan, the housekeeper; Maggie, the cook, and Delia, the maid—were all sniffing, for they had not had time to get over their fright.

"Now," said Ted, in a kindly voice, "tell us just what happened, the best you can."

"It was about half-an-hour ago, sir, when there was a noise on the front porch. The judge had just come home and gone into his study at the end of the hall.

"When I heard the noise on the porch I looked out of the window and saw about ten rough men. But I didn't think no harm of that, as many of the mining men are rough-looking, but honest and kind. A great many of them came to see the judge at times.

"I stepped into the hall to open the door for them, when they threw it open and walked in. Then I knew that something was wrong, and stepped in front of them. One of them caught hold of me and threw me aside, knocking over the chairs, and disturbing the judge, who came out of his study. But when he saw them he ran in again, and locked the door.

"The men rushed through the hall and, after trying to get the door open, and failing, began to kick on the lock in order to break it, I suppose. Just then the judge fired his revolver through the panel of the door. The bullet struck one of the men, and he dropped.

"At that instant the door flew open and the men rushed into the room. There a terrible struggle took place, and several shots were fired. Mrs. Swan and the girls were frightened speechless, and I told them to run and hide in the cellar, where you found us.

"They had no more than got out of sight than the men come out of the study, dragging the body of the judge behind them. He was dead, and there was a great gash on his head. At that I fled, followed by a bullet, and hid in the cellar. Some of the men came out in the yard and I heard them talking. One of them said:

"'Go into the stable and get the horses, we'll need them before we are through with this.'

"They got the horses out and then they went away. And that is all of the story, sir."

"What sort of a looking man was the leader?" asked Ted.

"He was a biggish man, with a beard, and he wore rough clothes, and a red flannel shirt, sir. A regular brute of a man, sir."

"That's enough, Jenkins," said Ted. "That's a very fair description of Tom Faggott. Boys, we are too late. The Faggotts have had their revenge. Now they will try their hands on us."

CHAPTER VII.

ABLAZE!

"Fellows," said Ted, addressing the boys, "we have temporized too long. I had thought to be able to secure the mine, settle this matter, and get the Faggotts out of the country without bloodshed, but they have opened the ball and we have got to go after them."

"Right yer are, Teddy, they've tromped on our moccasins, an' speakin' fer myself, my feet air tender, an' I am peevish about it. It's time ter fight now." Bud Morgan had his fighting blood up.

"This is where the vigilance committee comes in, I think," said Stella. "I believe it is time to hunt those fellows out of the country. Let us forget the mine for awhile. It will not spoil while we are hunting those fellows down."

"Right again, sister," said Bud. "Thar's nothin' like takin' time by ther fetlock."

"Even if you do get a good hard kick for your pains, eh?" said Mr. Graham.

"It is not likely that the Faggotts will stay around here much longer," said Ted. "They know that they must lose the mine sooner or later, and my idea is that they will try to revenge themselves on us, and will then leave the country."

"Yes, with er bunch o' young vigilantes hot on ther trail," said Bud Morgan. "Mr. Sheriff, I'm fer war. It's shore up ter us ter find an' punish ther fellers what has brought so much trouble on us, an' killed ther man what made us depooty sheriffs."

"I don't see any other way out of it, Bud," said Ted. "I, too, am for war."

"There is no use staying here any longer," said Stella. "Let us go up-town and get aunt, and then decide what course we are to pursue."

This met with general approval, and they went back to the town. There they found excited citizens grouped around the court-house.

The Faggotts had ridden triumphantly and defiantly through the town, bearing the bodies of the judge and one of their own men with them.

Such a bold act of lawlessness had never been heard of before, and the people had risen at last, although the bold front displayed by the Faggotts had deterred any of them from making a demonstration.

They had assembled to determine what should be done to rid the country of the Faggotts, or to bring them to justice.

Reports of the murder of a judge by a band of organized ruffians, in broad daylight, had been sent to the Denver newspapers, and soon a telegram was received in the town, addressed to the sheriff.

The station agent at the railroad, who was also the telegraph operator, knew that Ted had been appointed temporary sheriff, and, consequently, brought the telegram to him.

Ted opened it, and read the following:

"Report that judge has been murdered, and that county is in a state of terrorism. Can you handle the situation, or shall I send troops to your assistance?"

Ted smiled as he read the telegram. Evidently the newspaper correspondent had sent out a wild, imaginative report. Of course, the situation was bad enough, but there was no terrorism, and he proposed that there should be none.

He, therefore, sent a telegram to the governor, which said:

"No terrorism here. I have been appointed sheriff pro tem, and will soon have the situation in hand. If troops are needed, you will hear from me."

The governor had about time to read this when the answer came back to Ted, who was in the telegraph office. It was:

"Did not know you were there, Ted. I feel easier now, and know that you will win out."

This, naturally, was very gratifying to Ted, and rallying the boys, they called at the hotel for Mrs. Graham and returned to the cabin. They had to stick together now for mutual protection, and the cabin was a better place for them than the hotel, until they had decided what was best to do.

When they got back to the cabin, Ted went out to reconnoiter, and found that the mine was full of men, and that the Faggotts were there, also.

A strong guard was out everywhere, and it would be suicidal for the boys to make an attack at that time. He could see Tom Faggott out in front of the mine, parading up and down defiantly. Evidently the chief of the Faggotts was in a desperate mood, and was waiting to be attacked, knowing that he had every advantage.

When Ted got back to the cabin it was too late to make an attack on the mine that night, and he decided to wait until the morning.

The boys did not think that the Faggotts would dare attack the cabin so soon after having forced their way into the judge's house, and murdered and carried him away.

They were well aware of the state of the feeling against them in Mountain Springs since that latest outrage, and Tom Faggott was endowed with caution as well as audacity.

The first watch that night was taken by Bud, and he came in about midnight and woke up Carl, who was to follow him for two hours, and was to be followed by Clay Whipple, the Kentuckian.

"All's well," reported Bud, when he woke Carl.

"Haven't seen anything of them, have you?" asked Ted, who always slept with one eye open.

"Nary a sight, but I shore heard plenty," answered Bud.

"How was that?"

"Well, from what I hears, an' it ain't ther fust time, I'd say thet they wuz fillin' their pale Colorado hides with all ther booze in ther State," answered Bud.

"I suppose Tom Faggott has brought in liquor to keep their courage up, after the day's proceedings."

"Looks that way, er rather it listens so, from ther noise they're makin'. I never hear sich waulin' sence I left ther coyote country."

"Let them go it. The more they drink the better for us, the beasts." And Ted rolled over in his bunk and went to sleep again.

Carl turned out and into his clothes with many a yawn.

If there was anything Carl liked better than something good to eat, it was to sleep, and while he was not at all averse to doing his share of work, in camp or at the ranch or on the range, he disliked mightily a lone night watch.

If some one had been with him to keep him company, it would have been well with him, for he was a most sociable creature, and loved to sit and talk.

But Ted did not see the necessity of having more of the boys on guard than was necessary, and so it was that each of them was to stand two hours watch at a time.

As Bud watched Carl turn out of his nice warm bunk, and into his clothes, he laughed.

"What's ther matter, *Hoch der Kaiser?*" he asked, "Air yer sufferin' fer sleep. I see yer dozin' all evenin', an' yer went ter bed at nine, so I reckon yer ain't sufferin' none from insomnia."

"Vot's dot foolishness, insomnia?" asked Carl crossly.

"Ain't yer never hear o' thet?" asked Bud.

"No, I nefer hear o' such doodle business," said Carl.

"Jumpin' sand-hills! whar did yer pick up all yer eddication, Carl? Insomnia is a disease which comes from havin' either too much money er too much brains. I reckon yer never did hear o' it. That's right, I begs yer parding."

"Vell, vot iss it?"

"Insomnia, my son o' ther land o' ther bammy sourkrout, is not bein' able ter sleep o' nights."

"I don't nefer see you avake ven it is dime to be sleepin'."

"Did you ever hear o' ther maverick what almost lost his life by insomnia?"

"I nefer dit."

"A feller come to ther doctor an' says: 'Doc,' says he, 'I can't sleep nights, an' I'm goin' most crazy. If you don't put me to sleep soon I'll be a candidate fer ther foolish-house.'

"'So,' says ther doctor. 'What time do yer go ter bed?' 'Oh,' says the feller, who was dyin' o' insomnia, 'erbout ten o'clock, I reckon.'

"'An' I reckon yer lies thar all night tossin' erbout an' tryin' ter sleep, an' can't?"

"'No, doc, I don't. That's ther wust o' it. I go ter sleep right erway, an' jest lay thar dreamin' all night long thet I can't go ter sleep, an' it's wearin' me out.'"

"Oh, dry up and go to bed," came a gruff and sleepy voice from the direction of Ben's bunk.

"Vell, vot's der choke?" asked Carl.

"Get out of here, you Dutchman," came the roar from several of the bunks, and Carl, who had by this time scrambled into his clothes, left the cabin, and Bud turned in.

Carl kept a faithful watch for about an hour, pacing back and forth and around the cabin, and then got hungry.

As he walked up and down, his imagination got to picturing the delights of cold baked beans.

He knew where there was a store of them in the pantry in the cabin, and at last the pangs of his stomach stifled the admonitions of his conscience, and he slipped into the house and made his way to the pantry.

There he attacked the beans, to the accompaniment of a loaf of bread and a pot of cold coffee, and was delightfully engaged when Ted awoke.

Ted smelled smoke.

He was on his feet in an instant, and into his clothes. Kit, who slept in the next bunk, was awakened.

"What's the matter, Ted?" asked Kit sleepily.

"Hush! Get up. There's a fire somewhere. Don't you smell the smoke?" said Ted.

Kit was out in a minute, and also hurrying his clothes on.

"We must investigate," said Ted. "But don't make any noise. I don't want to wake the Grahams up. It may be nothing after all."

Ted and Kit went into the living-room. Nothing unusual there.

But suddenly there was a shriek from the room occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Graham.

"Fire!" The cry rang through the house, and in an instant every one was awake and out of bed.

The young rough riders, accustomed to night alarms, and Redmond were into their clothes in less time than it takes to tell it.

A moment later Stella was out in the living-room, looking as if she had got up and dressed for the day.

Next, Mrs. Graham came out of her room, supported by her husband. She was in a half-fainting condition.

"Ted," shouted Mr. Graham, "our room is a mass of flames."

"Come on, fellows," shouted Ted.

They followed him into the room.

Mr. Graham had spoken truly. The room was all ablaze, and the flames had gone through the ceiling and were even bursting through the roof.

"How could the fire have started and got so great a headway in such a short time?" was the question Ted asked himself as he sprang into the room, and saw instantly that the cabin was doomed.

At that instant Carl came running into the room.

"How did the house catch afire?" shouted Ted, thinking that Carl, coming from the outside, would know.

"Search me," said Carl innocently. "I haf yoost comed from der pantry ouid, vere I vos eading off dose beautiful peans vot vos left cold, afder der supper, alretty."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Ted. "Eating beans when those villains set the house on fire."

Ted and Bud jumped to the door to find a way of escape, for the fire had burned its way through to the boys' barracks on one side, and into the rear part of the cabin. In a moment the place would be a crumbling ruin.

As Ted opened the door several shots rang out, and he heard the spat of bullets on the door-posts.

He rushed to a window in the back of the cabin. Instantly the window-glass was shattered with bullets.

"Trapped!" he cried. "We must either stay here and burn to death, or be shot down like a lot of rabbits when we run out. The Faggotts are certainly getting their revenge, with interest."

"Wait a minute," said Redmond. "I know a way out. When the former owner of this house built it, he had the men construct a tunnel from the mine to the cabin, so that he could go back and forth easily. If that is still open we can escape. That is the way in which I proposed to conduct our force into the mine. We can enter it through a trap-door in the kitchen."

"Then hurry," shouted Ted, "or in a few minutes we'll all be burned to death."

Pieces of burning wood were falling into the room, while, outside, the Faggott gang were pouring bullets into the house through the windows, all the while yelling like drunken demons.

CHAPTER VIII.

EXPLODING THE MINE.

It did not take Redmond long to find the trap-door to the tunnel, which he knew was under the house.

He had known of its existence ever since he had been in charge of the mine.

As he threw it up he disclosed a dark hole, with no means of descent into it.

Even Redmond did not know how deep it was.

"We must get into the tunnel soon," said Ted. "If we do not, the house is going to tumble in upon us."

As he said this they heard the corner of the roof in the room the boys had occupied fall in.

The heat was becoming intolerable, and more than once Ted had slapped out the fire that had started on Stella's shoulder from a brand falling from above.

They were all gasping from the heat, and their clothes were smelling of scorch. It would not take long before their clothing would catch fire.

"I'll drop into it," said Ted. "It cannot be very deep, and then we will know. We must get out of here at once."

He lowered his body through the opening, hung a moment, and let go.

It was not more than six feet from the floor of the room to the bottom of the tunnel, and he called up word to send the ladies down.

As soon as the announcement was received above, Mr. Graham dropped beside him, and the boys lowered Mrs. Graham into the pit, and Stella followed.

As the last of the young rough riders dropped into the tunnel, the roof fell in with a crash, and there was a wild yell outside.

The Faggott gang were sure now that Ted Strong and his friends had perished in the fire.

"Lead the way!" shouted Ted to Redmond.

The tunnel was full of smoke, and they were all choking with it. The heat from the fire above was pouring into the tunnel as into a chimney, and they were almost blazing with it, when Ted gave the order to Redmond, and he pushed ahead.

Behind him Ted followed, leading Stella, who was staggering from the effects of the heat and smoke, while behind them came Mr. Graham, bearing in his arms his wife, who had fainted. He was assisted by Bud, for he was almost on the point of fainting himself.

In the rear came the boys, slapping their clothes to put out the flames that started into being from the intensity of the heat.

They were walking in the dark, Ted feeling his way along the dark tunnel, and keeping close to the wall.

Every moment or so he shouted back an encouraging word, and the rest staggered on in his wake.

But suddenly the tunnel came to an end.

They were in the center of a chamber of rock.

"This is the main shaft of the mine," exclaimed Redmond.

In the center of the circular chamber a fire burned on the floor. It had dwindled down, but there was light enough to show its size, and the contour of the walls.

Not a soul was in sight.

Ted took in the situation in a moment. This was the camping-place of the Faggotts, but they were all down at the blazing cabin, probably gloating over the death of Ted Strong and his young rough riders.

Ted smiled as he thought of it.

He was in possession of the mine without a struggle.

Mrs. Graham had recovered from the shock of the fright the fire had given her, and was all right again.

"Here we are in my mine," said Stella cheerfully. "Are we going to keep it?"

"I guess we are," answered Ted.

"They'll be back," said Redmond, "as soon as the fire dies down and the excitement is over."

"We'll be glad to meet them," said Ted.

"They outnumber us, three to one," Redmond said.

"Suppose they do," answered Ted. "We have five times the courage they have, and that counts for something."

"I suppose you are right," replied Redmond, "unless they have something with which to surprise us."

"Nothing that they could do would surprise me," said Ted.

"Well, we are not yet out of it, and if the worst comes I know a place within the mine where we can be safe from them," said Redmond.

"Then don't forget it if the time should come," said Ted. "In the meantime we hold the key to the situation, and we will be prepared to defend it."

Ted knew that if the Faggotts returned, it would have to be a battle, unless the gang would see that it was useless to try to retake the mine, and give it up.

But, on the other hand, the Faggotts had controlled the county so long that they were bloated with their success, and thought they could do anything.

"Where does that passage lead?" asked Ted, pointing to an opening in the rocky wall.

"That leads directly to the opening that you can see from where the cabin stood," answered Redmond.

"I'm going out to see what is going on," said Ted.

"Let me go with you," said Stella.

"Do you think it is safe?" asked her aunt anxiously.

"I think so," answered Ted. "It is not far to the entrance, and I merely want to look out and see what those fellows are doing."

"Hadn't some of the rest of us better come?" asked Ben.

"You can if you want to, but I think the fewer there are of us away from here, the better."

Nothing more was said, and when Ted and Stella started through the tunnel toward the mine entrance, the others remained behind to guard Mrs. Graham, and keep the fire up.

Ted was in the lead, as the two entered the tunnel, lighting the way with his electric search-light.

Stella was close behind him. Her heart was beating with excitement. She felt the danger of the situation, but she loved the spirit of the adventure, although something told her that she would better have stayed behind.

Nothing happened, however, and at last they reached the entrance to the mine, from which they could see the smoldering embers of the cabin.

Not a man was in sight about the fire.

Where had they gone? Was it possible that they had run away and left the mine when they found that Ted and his party had not been burned in the cabin, as they must have discovered when the fire had burned down sufficiently?

"See!" cried Stella, "they have run away, the cowards. I suppose they have given up the mine, don't you?"

"It looks like that," answered Ted. But he was not altogether sure that it was so.

Still, it did appear strange that the gang was nowhere to be seen.

Suddenly a loud laugh rang out and echoed through the tunnel.

Ted swung around and saw that the way was blocked by about twenty men, who had come out of another passage, where they had probably been concealed, watching Ted and Stella walk into the trap.

As Stella turned and saw them she involuntarily screamed.

"Steady!" said Ted, in a low voice.

Tom Faggott was facing him, and he was evidently under the influence of liquor.

"So you thought we would run away, did ye?" said Faggott. "We're not runners, my boy."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Ted, as cool as a cucumber. "I think before you are through with this, you will be on the run. I have seen a good many of your kind before, and I know that they generally run when things go against them."

"Well, it happens that things don't go against us," replied Faggott, with a sneer.

"You seem to have had the best of it, so far as crime is concerned," said Ted.

"We certainly don't propose to have an upstart like you come inter our country an' run us," said Faggott. "Now, I'll tell you what we'll do with you, young feller. If you'll agree to vamose out o' ther county an' take yer bunch with you, we'll let you go. But this mine is ours, an' we propose ter keep it."

"The mine doesn't belong to you," said Stella, with spirit. "It belongs to me."

"Oh, it does, does it?" said Faggott, mimicking her.

"It does, you drunken, murdering brute," returned the girl.

Her eyes were snapping with anger, and she looked very pretty in this mood.

Faggott leered at her, and grinned.

"Sorry you have such a bad opinion of me, miss," he said. "We'll have to remedy that in time."

"I hope you don't think I'm a quitter," said Ted quietly. "I shall certainly not get out of the country. I have been appointed sheriff of this county to enforce the order of the court to drive you from this mine. Now, I am in it, I propose to stay."

"You bet you will, eh, boys?" shouted Faggott.

There was a roar in reply

"What do you mean?" asked Ted.

"Just what I said," replied Faggott. "We're going to leave you an' yer friends here fer awhile, but we'll take the little beauty with us. She'll do to cook for us in our cove whar we're goin' for awhile."

"I guess not," said Ted, drawing both his revolvers.

But there was a sudden rush, and, before he could fire, Ted was swept off his feet and fell upon the rocky floor, his head coming in contact with a stone.

Just as he lost consciousness from the blow, he heard Stella scream, and tried to bring himself back to consciousness, but could not.

When he opened his eyes again he was in darkness and silence. He called the name of Stella, and received no reply.

He tried to move, and found that he was tied securely, hand and foot.

Rolling to the right he came to a stone wall, and, repeating the process to the left, came to another.

He was probably in the side passage, near the entrance to the mine, and the Faggott gang had made off with Stella.

Here was a bad predicament. Where were the boys? Why did they not come to his assistance? He yelled as loud as he could, and waited for an answer.

After waiting a few minutes he yelled again.

Then he heard a faint cry. Some one had heard him.

He heard the patter of feet coming nearer along the passage.

"Yi-i-ip!"

It was Bud's familiar yelp, and Ted answered it.

"Whar yer be?" asked Bud, somewhere out in the dark.

"In here, Bud; hurry," cried Ted.

In a moment Bud's foot struck him, and the old cowpuncher was on his knees beside him in a moment, and was cutting the ropes that bound him.

"Jumpin' sand-hills! what's happened? Whar's ther gal? How come yer so?" were the questions Bud poured out.

"The Faggotts got us as we were looking out of the mine entrance, and I was knocked down. They've taken her with them."

"Wow! That's right bad, Ted."

"It's worse than that. Where are the boys?"

"Back in the same place, waiting for you to come."

"How long have I been gone?" Ted did not know how long he had been unconscious.

"Not more than ten minutes. I heerd yer let out a peep, but I don't reckon none o' ther rest o' them did, an' I made a sneak out o' ther camp an' come."

"You always manage to get to me in time, Bud."

"Thet's because yer so derned reckless, Ted."

"Well, never mind that. Let us get back to the boys. The Faggotts have opened the big show, and we've got to get on their trail and pursue them like a lot of hounds until we get Stella, and land them all."

They ran to where the rest of the party were, and in as few words as possible Ted told them what had happened.

"We've got to hit the trail as soon as possible," said Ted. "It is my impression that they will take to the mountains, and hide in one of their mountain houses, which they call hotels, but which are really 'blind tigers,' until they think we are out of the country. We must trail them to where they have taken Stella."

"We will go," was the reply.

At that instant there was a dull boom, followed by a roar that reverberated along the passages of the mine.

"God have mercy!" cried Redmond. "They have blown up the mine. This way!"

With a rush they followed the superintendent out of the chamber in which they had camped just as the loosened rock began to fall behind them.

Had they remained a second longer they would all have been crushed to death.

As they entered the passage it collapsed behind them, and before them, and they were trapped.

CHAPTER IX.

ANOTHER PRISONER.

"This is horrible," said Mr. Graham.

Mrs. Graham was sobbing quietly in her husband's arms, but in a moment she recovered herself. In this, their greatest difficulty, her woman's courage came to the front.

"Never mind, dear," she said to her husband. "We'll come out of it all right. Won't we?"

"Surest thing yer know," came Bud's cheery voice. "This reminds me o' once when I wuz down on ther Pecos——"

"Cut it," growled Ben. "This is no time for Pecos yarns."

"I think it's jest the time fer a merry jest," laughed Bud. "It might lighten ther gloom a bit."

They were in the dark, and could only tell where one another stood by their voices.

Those in advance had stopped when the rock fell in front of them, and those in the rear had discovered that there was no retreat.

The mine was full of the fumes of the dynamite that had been exploded, so that the air was not pleasant to breathe, and in the confined space in which the party found itself, it was growing worse every minute.

"We must find a way out of this pretty soon," Ted whispered to Redmond, who was by his side, "or we'll suffocate."

"I know it," replied the mine superintendent. "If we only had a light it would be easier. I've been feeling around, but fingers are not as good as eyes in a case like this."

"Why, there's plenty of light," said Ted. "Bud, have you got your pocket search-light?"

"Shore!" exclaimed Bud. "What a plum I was not ter think o' it before."

In a moment there came a beam from his light.

"Any more of yer got er light?" asked Bud.

Several were produced, and they at once began to examine their prison.

The passage in which they found themselves was about five feet wide, cut in the solid rock, as the miners had followed a vein of ore, and it had been shored up as they proceeded, but it had been some time since the vein had worked out, and the timbers had rotted in places.

Where they now were the timbers had stood, which was the reason that they had not been crushed to death by the falling rock

Redmond had been examining the débris in front of them carefully, with the aid of the search-light.

Suddenly he uttered an exclamation.

"What is it?" asked Ted.

"I think we can work an opening here," replied Redmond.

"How?"

"The rock that has fallen is not very thick here, and we may be able to lift it out and pass it back, and so make a hole big enough for us to crawl through."

"Is the passage open beyond?"

"I can't tell yet. We may only be able to get into another opening like this."

"Well, we'll try it, anyway. Boys, stand by to pass these rocks into the back part of the passage, and pile them so that they will take up as little room as possible."

The work began at once. Ted and Redmond taking away the fallen rock, and handing it to the others behind them. They worked cheerfully, with many a good-natured jest, and it was not long before Ted announced that he thought they could get through.

First Ted crawled through the small opening they had made, and soon saw that the passage beyond was open, at least for a considerable distance, and that the air was much better.

Mrs. Graham was then helped through, and the rest followed.

"Where does this passage lead?" asked Ted of Redmond.

"If it is not closed up it should bring us into that chamber where you found me," answered Redmond. "But it has been a long time out of use, and it may be closed somewhere along its length."

"I think it is open," said Ted. "You observe that the air is much fresher and cooler. It must come from somewhere above. Don't you think so?"

"I believe you are right," said Redmond. "We shall soon know."

Ted led the advance with his light, and it was not long before he emerged into the chamber with the ladders.

"Hurrah!" he shouted back to the stragglers.

They needed cheering up, especially the Grahams, who were not used to the strenuous life the boys had led.

In a few moments they were all together in the chamber of the old mine.

"How are we to get out of here?" asked Mrs. Graham.

"We'll have to climb those ladders," said Ted.

"I never could do it," said Mrs. Graham, "I'd rather stay for the rest of my natural life."

"You might set up housekeeping down here," said Ted to Mr. Graham, with a laugh.

"I'd have the house already built, wouldn't I?" was the reply.

"What's that?" exclaimed Ted, holding up his hand for silence.

Every one listened intently.

Presently they heard a faint groan.

Ted still held up his hand. He was trying to locate from whence the groan had come. Evidently some one else was in the mine, and in pain.

Suddenly a light broke on the face of Redmond. He grasped Ted's arm and pointed in the direction of the pit from which Ted had dragged him.

Ted sprang toward it and threw the beams of his search-light into it, as he had done once before.

In a moment he discovered what he had been looking for, and a cry of surprise and relief broke from his lips.

"Find the rope," he cried. "Hurry! I have made a great discovery."

The boys soon found the rope with which Redmond had been dragged from the pit.

"Hold it well, fellows," said Ted, "I am going down there. When I give the signal, pull me out again."

The boys paid the end of the rope into the pit, and Ted extinguished the light and stuffed it into his pocket, and, throwing off his coat and hat, prepared to climb down.

"I wonder what he saw down there?" Mrs. Graham asked her husband.

"Some other poor prisoner, I suppose," was the answer.

Redmond was greatly excited. He knew what it meant to be a prisoner in that pit, and his warm Irish heart was throbbing with pity.

They heard Ted reach the bottom of the pit, and in a moment his light shone out.

Then they heard a faint cry, and Ted's strong words of encouragement, and, leaning over the edge of the pit, they saw him, in a far corner of the horrible prison, stoop and pick something up in his arms and walk toward them.

Redmond, who had endured the starvation and horrors of the pit, groaned as he watched the scene.

When Ted got to the rope he laid his burden down.

Then he began to tie the rope around his body.

After he had done that, he called to the boys:

"Pull me up, but very carefully, and several of you take hold of the rope."

He stooped and picked up the burden he had laid down, then gave the signal, and the boys pulled him out of the pit.

Bud took the burden from his arms.

A cry of astonishment went up from all. It was a man, and the man was their friend—the judge.

But not the judge they had known, for he was haggard and scarcely alive. His white hair was matted with blood from a wound on the head, and his right arm hung limp. It had been broken by a bullet.

That he was able to breathe was a marvel, for he was not only badly wounded, but had suffered from hunger, thirst, and cold.

"We've got to get him out of here as soon as we can, or we will not be able to save him," said Ted. "He is as near dead now as I wish to see him."

"It is not possible to carry him to the top of that ladder," said Mr. Graham.

"I know it," said Ted. "There ought to be another way out of this place. I am going to take a look around and find out."

He started out with his search-light, and soon returned to announce that he had found another opening, evidently made by the explosion of the dynamite set off by the Faggotts.

"They got us into a lot of trouble," said Ted. "But their blow-up has helped us this much."

He picked the judge up in his arms again and led the way out of the chamber, into a cleft in the rock wall.

It proved to be what he had said, a wide rift caused by the explosion, for it had never been seen by Redmond before, although he claimed to know every foot of the mine, from long service there.

"I don't know where it leads to," said Ted. "But it evidently is taking us toward the entrance to the mine."

Ted was right.

In a few minutes the party saw a gleam of light ahead of them, and soon they emerged into the daylight, and saw the valley lying before them, and, in the distance, the town of Mountain Springs.

Ted was tired out with carrying the judge, and the boys made a litter, and took turns in bearing him down the mountainside.

He was unconscious most of the time, but occasionally muttered something about his cases.

Kit was hurried ahead to find a doctor, and bring him to the judge's house.

The procession of the boys, with the judge, through the town, brought out the populace, which formed around them in a dense mass, asking questions in hushed voices.

To them it was as if the judge had arisen from the dead, as they had all believed that the Faggotts had killed the old jurist, who was well known and respected in the town.

When the boys arrived at the judge's house, they bore him at once to his room and laid him on the bed.

Soon Kit arrived with the doctor, and Ted remained with him while the boys awaited the result of the examination, in the room below.

In front of the house the populace stood, waiting for news of the judge's condition, which Ted promised to send to them as soon as the doctor had finished his examination. That Ted and the young rough riders were not cheered, was due only to the fact that the crowd was afraid of disturbing the sick man.

"Well, what do you think of his condition?" asked Ted, after the doctor had gone over the judge in a critical examination.

"I think he'll pull through," said the doctor. "But he has had a close call. Another twelve hours in the mine would have finished him. As it is, he is in very bad shape, and it will be a struggle."

The doctor at once applied restoratives, and it was not long before the judge opened his eyes and looked around.

His gaze rested on Ted for a moment, and he beckoned him to the bedside.

"Did you find me and bring me here?" he asked. "It seemed that I dreamed you did."

"Yes," answered Ted. "We all found you and brought you here."

"I knew I could trust you boys," said the old judge. "What has become of those scoundrels?"

Briefly Ted told him all that happened.

"Go, my boy," he said. "You must find them and bring them to justice. They knocked me on the head after shooting me, and abused me dreadfully. I fought as well as I could, but there were too many of them for me. Then they took me to that hole in the mountain and left me to die of starvation, or be eaten by the rats. You must find them."

"That is what I am anxious to do, sir," said Ted.

"Then go. I will not keep you, but I want to express my gratitude to you for what you did for me."

Ted muttered that it was unnecessary, and the doctor having told him that he could take care of the judge, with the assistance of Jenkins, Ted left the room, and, summoning the boys, went outside, where he assured the people that the judge would probably get well, and advised them to return to town so that there might be quiet around the house.

When he got to the town, Ted immediately set about getting horses for his force, and, when it was known what he wanted, nearly every man in the place came forward with an offer to lend him one. And in this manner he was soon equipped, and took the trail in search of Stella and the Faggotts.

CHAPTER X

ENEMIES IN CAMP.

As Ted was getting his force together in front of the hotel, where they were to say good-by to Mr. and Mrs. Graham, who, it was decided, were not to go on the expedition, he was approached by a young fellow, slightly older than himself.

"I am Dick Waverly," said the young fellow. "You are Ted Strong, I have been told."

"That is my name," said Ted, looking the youth over carefully. He was not inclined to favor the inhabitants of Mountain Springs very much, for they had not shown themselves to be very courageous, where the Faggotts were concerned, and not one of them had, so far, offered to join the party in the hunt for the thieves and murderers who had ruled them for so long a time.

But this chap looked all right. He was tall and slender, and had a good pair of eyes, that looked straight into those of the person to whom he was talking.

"What can I do for you, pardner?" asked Ted, after the manner of the West.

"Nothing at all for me," replied the young fellow, "but I thought I might be of some use to you."

"In what way?"

"Do you know just where you are going to find the Faggott gang?"

"I do not, but that is not going to prevent me from looking for them."

"Certainly not," answered Waverly, smiling. "But I suppose you know that they have more hiding-places than one."

"From what I learned about them I supposed as much," answered Ted. He was beginning to like this chap.

"I know they have."

"Well, come to the point," said Ted.

"I was a deputy sheriff until this man Paxton was elected, but I couldn't stand for him, and I resigned."

"So there are others who do not admire Mr. Paxton."

"Plenty of them. What I was going to say was this: I should be glad to join your expedition, merely for the recreation of the thing. I just got into town this morning. I have been working in a railroad office in Denver and got my vacation yesterday, and thought I would run down here for a few days.

"When I got in, the station agent told me something about what had been happening here. I have heard of you, and thought I would like to go with you. I was working in this county when the Faggotts first came into it, and I know where every one of their 'blind tigers' is located."

Naturally Ted was somewhat fearful of treachery on the part of the Faggotts, and they might have sent one of their fellows to lead the young rough riders into ambush or distract them from the right trail. Ted had not time to look into Waverly's pedigree, but something told him that he was all right.

After he had taken a second look at this new applicant to share honors and dangers with the crowd, he stuck out his hand, and said:

"All right, we'd be glad to have your assistance."

"Glad you decided that way," said Waverly, grasping the proffered hand in a way that Ted liked, with a good, firm grip.

"Got a horse?"

"Sure, he's down home."

"Then you live here?"

"Yes, my father's president of the Miners' and Merchants' Bank. Thought maybe you had heard of him."

"No, I've been too busy up at the mine to get acquainted around town."

"Well, I'll go and saddle up and meet you at the end of the street in ten minutes."

"Looks like a good one," said Ted to Bud, as young Waverly strode off.

"Likely young maverick," said Bud. "What did he want?"

Ted told him what Waverly had said, and Bud took another look down the street after the disappearing applicant for membership in the King of the Wild West's posse of deputy sheriffs.

"He looks clean enough, an' if he ain't, thar's enough o' us ter wash him out," remarked Bud dryly. "Yer cain't never tell whether a shirt er a blanket is all wool until it hez bin through ther wash."

"That's true," said Ted. "But he looks good enough to take a chance with. Besides, if he turns out all right, so much the better, because when we clash with that Faggott gang we will need all hands."

"I reckon—and a few feet," said Bud.

"Well, it's time to hit the trail," said Ted, climbing into the saddle, and the boys all followed his example, as lifting his hat to Mrs. Graham, who was sitting on the hotel veranda, Ted rode away with his cavalcade.

When they arrived at the end of the street, they were met by Waverly, who was mounted on a splendid little horse and carried a businesslike Winchester, besides a pair of Colt .44's.

Ted introduced him generally to the boys as a new deputy sheriff, and he fell in with them as they jogged out of town. They were a fine-looking lot of young fellows, and they all had good mounts, as Ted had accepted only the best of the horses that were offered to them.

As they passed down the main street, every one stopped to look at their uniforms. Each carried a new Winchester, all their rifles and extra equipment having been destroyed in the fire at the cabin.

Several of them had cooking utensils attached to their saddles, and others sacks of such provisions as could be carried without resorting to pack-animals, which would retard their swift movement, in case of a charge or hasty retreat.

In a case of this kind, Ted always believed in traveling as light cavalry.

After they were out of the town, Ted called to Waverly, and when he had ridden to the front, asked him some questions about the location of the Faggott "blind tigers."

"Now you understand the situation, don't you, Mr. Waverly?" asked Ted.

"Not altogether," was the answer. "But please call me Dick, if you don't mind."

"All right, Dick, it is this: Our first and foremost object is to rescue Miss Fosdick, who was carried off by the Faggotts. Everything else can wait."

Then he briefly outlined all that happened, and how they came to be dragged into it.

From time to time Dick Waverly nodded.

"All right, Ted, I think I'm on," he said, when Ted had finished. "I have some feeling in this matter, because, you see, the judge is my uncle, and I am in this for a little private revenge of my own."

"Well, what would you advise? Where should we go?"

"I've been thinking it over," said Dick. "They have a place over on the Gallopin Range. It is their head quarters, where they have always gone when they were in trouble."

"That's what they are in now, or will be when we find them," said Ted.

"Old Mother Faggott, the greatest witch of a woman you ever saw, lives there and keeps the place when the boys, as she calls them, are away. She is a brave old woman, and has no fear of any man. That is probably where they have gone."

"What do they call this place on the Gallopin Range?"

"It is called the Half-Way House, because it is halfway between the towns of Santa Elisa and Donnerman."

"Then that is where we go first. If we do not find them there, we will seek farther. This trail ends only at their camp, wherever it may be."

"We'll not be able to make it to-night, but we can by to-morrow night, and I would advise going into camp in Belton Park, which is a grassy glade, with timber, through which Sullivan River runs."

"All right," said Ted. How far is that from here?"

"About an hour's ride."

"Then we'll take it. Forward, fellows!"

Ted struck out at a good pace, and the young rough riders galloped after him.

The ride was kept up without stop until they arrived in Belton Park, a beautiful valley among the mountains, and, turning their horses out hobbled, so that they would not wander far, proceeded to make camp.

But Ted was scanning the mountainsides with his field-glass, and finally announced that he was going out to try to shoot a deer, so that they would have some fresh meat for supper.

Ben Tremont had bought some fishing-tackle before he left Mountain Springs, and said he would try to get a mess of trout in case there should be no venison.

And, as Ted rode away, the others set about getting in firewood and doing other necessary things for a night camp, where the air comes down from the mountain, thin and cold before morning.

Ted crossed the park at a gallop, and was soon climbing the mountain, looking on every hand for game.

He came upon the sign of bear once or twice, but as he was after venison, he kept on his way.

Suddenly he pulled in his horse, swiftly raised his Winchester to his shoulder, and shot. A deer leaped from a thicket and went bounding over the rocks, with Ted in full pursuit.

For an hour, or more, he pursued the deer, taking a shot at it whenever the opportunity presented itself, but, although he could see that he hit it several times, it was never in a vital spot.

At last the deer came to a considerable stream, into which it jumped and swam to the other side.

The horse was about pumped out, and Ted drew up on the bank. He was not sure for a moment whether or not it would be a good plan to pursue the deer farther with his horse in that condition.

All the while he kept his eye on the deer, which, to his great satisfaction, ran only about two hundred yards farther and fell beside a turbulent stream, which emptied into that on the bank of which he stood.

He was on the Sullivan River, but at the time he did not know it. He had made a wide detour in chasing the deer, and had come out on the very stream on which the camp had been made. The water was very cold, as all the mountain streams of Colorado are, and he did not like to put the horse to it, as it was overheated from its long run. He thought best, therefore, to hobble it where he was, and cross and secure the deer and carry it over.

The river was not more than breast-high at that place, and he was soon beside his fallen prey, and after bleeding it, he hung it to a tree and proceeded to skin it.

When he had dressed it, and tied the choicest parts up in the skin, to be transported back to camp, he was astonished to observe that twilight had suddenly fallen.

For a moment he stood thinking whether he should attempt to go back to camp that night, or wait until morning, and decided to wait, for he was not sure about the way back, and his horse was tired.

The boys would not worry about him, and he could be up early and away, and get to camp before they were astir.

His horse was all right where it was, and he built a fire and broiled a venison steak on a griddle, made of green willow boughs, drank of the fresh, cold water of the mountain stream that rushed past his camping-place, and lay down to gaze up at the stars that seemed close enough to grasp, in the clear, thin air of that altitude. Lulled by the sound of the stream flowing by, he soon dropped asleep.

He was wakened shortly afterward by a furious snarling and growling, and, looking up from his bed of pine boughs, saw that several mountain lions had found his supply of venison.

The moon had risen since he had lain down, and the lions, attracted to the camp by the smell of the blood, had got the meat from the limb where he had hung it, and were fighting over it.

He rose to his feet, and grasping a brand from his camp-fire, waved it above his head and shouted. But the great cats were not frightened. One of them began to creep toward him, and he reached for his revolver.

To his horror, he discovered that he did not have it. He had left it with his rifle and saddle on the other side of Sullivan River. Here was a tight corner, and he continued to shout and wave his brand. But, instead of retreating, the lion kept up their advance.

Then he discovered that one of the lions had crept toward him from the other side, and was approaching him with long, fearless, sinuous strides. He turned in another direction. On a boulder, by his side, was a third of the gigantic cats, balanced, crouched low, ready to spring upon him.

His situation was extremely critical. The lions had got the taste of blood.

They had devoured the deer, and their hunger and lust for blood was not nearly satisfied. They were looking to him to finish the feast.

He was retreating before their advance, utterly powerless to defend himself, when, suddenly, he fell over backward into the rushing mountain torrent, just as the beast on the rock sprang at him.

CHAPTER XI.

BATTLING WITH MOUNTAIN LIONS.

As Ted struck the water, the lion which had missed him in its spring went into the stream behind him.

Ted swam for his life down-stream. If he could get to the other side of the river, and secure his rifle, he would be all right.

He could hear the lion that was swimming behind him puff and splash, as it came eagerly after him. But Ted was an expert swimmer, and, aided by the current, he had no fear, for he felt sure that he could beat the beast to the other side of the Sullivan.

He heard a patter on the bank, which was raised only about a foot above the surface of the water.

As he looked up he saw two green eyes looking down at him, and dodged just in time to avoid being scalped by a huge paw. By his side, keeping pace with him, trotting along the bank, were two of the mountain lions. They were keeping pace with him, their eyes gleaming hungrily in the moonlight.

Ted had had some strenuous experiences in his life, but this was one in which there was more cold horror than he had ever known.

To be tracked by these beasts along the shore was bad enough, but, all the while, he could hear the panting of the brute behind him, and the splash of its paws in the water.

Once its claws tore through his shirt and reached his skin, and he put on a spurt and got out of its reach. It was a narrow escape.

Now the current swung him against the bank, and one of the lions which was following him along the bank made a slash at him with its claws, and just grazed his face, cutting a series of slashes in his shoulder.

But the next moment he was out in the middle of the stream, and he heard the lion snarl discontentedly at the loss of its prey.

The terrible creature was relentlessly pursuing him. At times he thought he felt its hot breath on his neck, but, as he looked around, he saw that it was about six feet behind him.

The lions on the bank were now getting more eager, and whenever he came close to the edge he could see their flat heads shoot out, followed by their lightning like paws, but they did not reach him.

Now the creek was widening and he saw, to his joy, that it was the confluence with the Sullivan River.

In an instant he was in the river stream, swimming rapidly across to where his horse was hobbled.

But the lion which had swum after him was not going to let his victim escape so easily as the others, which stopped on the bank where the river began.

It kept close behind him, and, when it got into the river, it swam the faster.

It had almost reached him, when Ted clambered up the bank, and ran to where he had left his saddle and weapons.

He got his revolver and rushed back, to find the lion crawling up the bank; its eyeballs gleaming in the moonlight, and its sharp fangs glistening. It was growling, like a cat disturbed at its food.

Just as it was creeping toward him he fired.

The ball flattened against its hard skull, and the animal sprang forward.

Ted leaped to one side, and as the huge body of the mountain lion flashed past him, in the pale moonlight, he took a snap shot, and hit it behind the fore leg, at a distance of not more than three feet.

A scream of agony shook the mountainside, and there were answering screams from across the river, and Ted ran and threw the saddle on his trembling pony, unhobbled it, and dashed through the woods, down the bank of the Sullivan River.

By the stars, he guessed that it was about ten o'clock, and soon he was out of the hills and into the park again. In the east he saw a faint flicker of light, and his experienced eye told him that it came from a smoldering camp-fire, and he rode toward it.

As he dashed up, Bud Morgan rose from beside it and called: "Who goes thar?"

"It's me, Bud," answered Ted.

"I knowed it wuz. What yer doin' out so late? I wuz plumb worried about yer, an' wuz wonderin' ef ther booger men, ther Faggotts, hed got yer."

"No, I had a better time than that."

Then Ted told what had happened, and Bud listened with open mouth.

"Don't yer know ther cats is at their wust at this time o' ther year, an' thet they won't touch yer no time else; an' will run from yer? But jest now they're hungry for meat, bein' ther time when their young is weanin'?"

"No, I didn't know it, Bud," answered Ted. "I haven't had much experience with mountain lions."

"Well, it's so. Keep away from ther critters at this time o' ther year. I'm shore glad yer back, an' I reckon I'll turn in an' git my sleepin's."

In a moment they were both rolled in their blankets, and fast asleep.

Camp was called early in the morning, almost before the eastern sky turned gray, and they ate a breakfast of bacon and trout, and listened to Ted's tale of why they had missed venison steak. As soon as they could saddle, they were on the trail again; Ted and Waverly leading the way.

They rode all day, stopping for a few minutes at noon for refreshment, and were on their way again.

For several hours they had been following a mountain road that led up between the pines.

"We are not far from the Half-Way House now," said Waverly, reining in his horse.

"Then we will turn into the woods here and camp," said Ted. "I am going forward, alone, to investigate the place, and see if there is any trace of Stella. If there is, and I get into trouble, I will give the long yell, and you know what to do."

"We do!" shouted the boys in chorus.

"Not quite so loud," said Ted. "Your never can tell who is about."

"You can't," came the chorus again.

"Stop your kidding," laughed Ted. "But hold yourselves in readiness to jump in when you hear me."

"Don't you think it would be a good scheme if I went erlong, Ted?" said Bud.

"Never mind, you'll get there in plenty of time if there is anything doing," said Ted. "I never knew you to be late when you were needed."

"That's not ther p'int, Ted," said Bud earnestly, "but you do take ther derned awfullest chances."

"I do," said Ted. "But isn't that the only way we ever won out? If we all blundered into everything, do you suppose we ever would have won half we went after?"

"Mebbe not. Take yer chances. Some day ye'll hev yer head shot off."

"All right, it's my head," said Ted, as he threw the saddle from the back of his pony, and the coat from his own back, and seeing that his cartridge-belt was full, and his revolvers in good condition, he waved his hand, and disappeared into the woods.

Bud looked after him with a queer smile on his face, and he went into consultation with the young rough riders.

It resulted in saddles being put on the ponies and their being led out on the trail Ted had taken.

* * * *

Ted went forward through the woods until he came within sight of a long one-story house built of logs in a clearing in the forest at the top of the range of mountains. The stage road led past the house. It was the main highway between the two important towns on either side of the range, as well as the only trading-point for a prosperous mining district.

This was the Half-Way House that Waverly had told him about.

He tethered his pony in the woods, and, concealing himself in the underbrush, sat down to watch it.

Men were passing in and out of the house, and among them he recognized several of the Faggott brothers.

He knew now that he was on the right track, and that Waverly had led him to the right place. If Stella was anywhere in the possession of the Faggotts she was here.

As he was watching the house—for he could see both the front and the back doors—Stella came out carrying a tin bucket in her hand and was evidently bound on a blackberrying expedition, for she was coming toward the woods, on the edge of which was a thicket of berry bushes.

Ted waited until she had reached the woods, and then, followed her course until she had got some distance from the house.

The old woman was standing in the doorway watching her, and he dare not attract her attention at once.

Stella walked along the edge of the woods, industriously picking berries. When he thought she was far enough away from the house Ted whispered, "Stella!"

The girl looked up, startled.

"Pay no attention to me. Keep on picking berries, but listen to what I say. This is Ted."

"All right," said Stella. "I hear you. I knew you would come. What do you want me to do?"

"How many of them are in the house?" asked Ted.

"There are nine!"

"Do you suppose you could disarm them?"

"They feel that they are perfectly safe here, and they go about without arms in the house."

"Where are their weapons?"

"They have left them in one of the back rooms."

"Can you get them and hide them, so that they cannot be found in an emergency?"

"I think I can."

"Do so, then come to the back door and whistle. After that leave it to me."

"All right. But first I must fill this bucket with berries."

Stella kept on picking berries, while Ted, on the other side of the patch, kept talking to her, and telling her what to do.

In a few minutes she had filled the bucket and went back into the house, and Ted waited in the edge of the woods for the signal.

CHAPTER XII.

THE END OF THE FAGGOTTS.

Ted waited for at least a half hour. Then he saw Stella at the back door.

There was a whistle, and Ted dashed out of the woods toward the house.

As he sprang through the front door into the barroom he found it filled with the members of the Faggott gang, the brothers, with the old woman in the bar serving drinks.

There were nine of the Faggotts, and they were making merry by themselves, as there was not a guest in the place.

As Ted dashed into the room Tom Faggott sprang to his feet and looked at Ted as if he had seen a ghost.

He thought that he had effectually disposed of Ted when he bound him in the mine and then blew it up.

"Well, by thunder, youngster," he roared. "Back again?"

"Very much so," said Ted, with a grin.

"What do you want now?" asked Faggott. "Some more of the same kind, or a dose of stronger medicine?"

The gang roared and beat on the tables with their fists at what passed for wit with their leader.

Ted looked at them with contempt.

"I have come to arrest you," he said.

"Oh, you did, my little dicky bird," said Tom Faggott. "You've come to the right place."

"I know I have," said Ted.

"Well, what do you want first?"

"I want you all to get up and march out of this place."

Ted had drawn his revolvers, and had them covered.

But one of them had slipped out of the room, and now came back with a frightened look on his face.

"Say, Tom," he exclaimed, "the guns are gone."

"What's that?" roared the chief.

"I say, the guns are gone."

"Where are they gone to?"

"I don't know."

"It's the work o' that girl, I bet," shouted Tom.

"Well, it don't make no difference," said the other. "Who cares for a kid?"

"You'll find me no kid before you get through with me," said Ted.

"Why, I could take you across my knee and spank you," said big Tom Faggott.

"Perhaps you could if I would let you," answered Ted.

"See here, my boy, you have a lot of cheek to come to my house and talk like that."

"Oh, I don't know," said Ted. "I have you beaten now at every turn."

"I don't see how you make that out. I have the girl what you says owns the mine, and now I have you."

Ted laughed so heartily at this that big Tom began to scowl.

"Yes," said Ted, "you have me like the fellow who had the hornet in his trousers pocket."

"How is that?"

"You have me, but you are stung, and before you are through with me you will wish you didn't have me."

"Come, boy, enough of this. You have walked into our trap again, and this is one you cannot get away from."

"Nonsense," said Ted. "You are entirely at my mercy. You are unarmed, and I have weapons."

"Before you could shoot we could have you down as we did in the mine. Put away your guns. They will be of no use to you."

"I am glad you think you could down me again as you did in the mine, but I want to tell you that before you succeeded I would get a few of you."

"Well, there are plenty of us."

"But not enough to get me. I told you once that I would bring you into camp, and I am here to do it."

"Tush! You are a boy and we are men, and there are nine of us."

"I don't care if there were ninety-nine of you. You are a coward, Tom Faggott, and every act of your life shows it."

"You talk very bravely because you have two guns pointed at me."

"I would fear you just as little if I didn't have, if you were a man and would show fair play, but that is a thing you never did in your life."

"You are called King of the Wild West. But I am the King of the Mountains, and I have earned the title by thrashing every man who came along. If you are as brave as you claim you should give me fair play, but you cover me with your gun and call me names when I have none. Is that fair play?"

"It is so far as you are concerned, for you are a treacherous man, and you know it. You are nine to one, but the guns make us even, but to show you that I am not afraid of you I will fight you any way you choose on an equal footing."

"You will?" exclaimed Tom Faggott eagerly.

"I said so."

"How would you like to wrestle?"

"I can do it. I have tackled worse propositions than you."

"I'd hate to do it. You are only a bantam."

"That makes no difference. If you think I am taking advantage of you I want to show you that I have always given every man a fair chance for his life. If you want to make the test wrestling, I'll go you."

"You've got your nerve, youngster," said Tom Faggott, rising from his chair, "and I want to tell you that you'll get a fair chance, and if you win I lose."

"I told you what I would do, and if I lose it will be my fault."

"And if you win you will have my brothers to fight."

"I'll agree to take them one at a time."

"Then it's a go."

"All right, walk out of the house, single file, if you please, in front of me," said Ted, never for a moment lowering his weapons.

With sly looks at one another the nine brothers walked out of the house.

Ted knew, of course, that if there was any chance for treachery the Faggotts would take advantage of it.

But he knew that Stella was on guard, and that she would not let him be beaten by foul means if she could help it, and he believed that she knew the way and had prepared for it.

When they were in the yard in front of the house Ted lined eight of the brothers on one side with the aid of his revolvers, for which they seemed to have great respect.

"You will stand there," he said, "until this bout is

settled. Then if there is anything I can do for you I will be glad to accommodate you."

Little preparation was necessary for the wrestling match. Tom Faggott threw off his coat and tossed his big sombrero on top of it, and announced himself ready.

At that moment Stella bounded out of the house.

When he saw her Ted felt easy.

As she ran to his side he threw his revolvers on the ground. Several of the brothers started to make a rush for them, but Stella had them in her hands in an instant, and was pointing them in their direction, and the men drew back.

Suddenly Tom Faggott sprang at Ted.

It was a cowardly and treacherous act.

But Ted was prepared for him, and, as he reached him, Ted threw out his arm and caught the bully across the neck, stopping his progress and enabling Ted to get a hold on him.

Faggott was fifty pounds heavier than Ted, but he had not the litheness that Ted possessed.

Ted knew many tricks of the wrestling game, and proceeded to put them into practice.

Faggott knew only one thing; brute strength.

They wrestled back and forth for several minutes with varying success on either side.

Meantime Stella was holding back the brothers, and had it not been for the revolvers with which she covered them they would have rushed in long since and stopped the bout.

At last Ted saw his opening and pressed his arm across the neck of big Tom Faggott and shoved his head back.

He felt the big bully's breath come hard.

He was being choked into submission.

His brothers saw that he was being beaten, and started to rush to his aid.

But Stella leaped in front of them.

"One at a time, gentlemen!" cried Stella, bringing her batteries to bear on the tribe of Faggott. "Fair play for every one is our motto."

They retreated in confusion.

At this moment, just as Ted was bearing Tom Faggott to the ground, there was a cheer from the woods, and the young rough riders, led by Bud Morgan, galloped out, and in a moment were at the house.

In a twinkling they had surrounded and captured the eight brothers.

Ted had taken care of Tom Faggott, who was lying on the ground with the breath knocked out of him.

As Ted arose he looked at the captured gang.

"Stella's vigilance committee has done a pretty good job to-day," he said. "If it hadn't been that Stella found and concealed their revolvers we wouldn't have done this so easily."

"Yes, but if Ted hadn't been able to beat that big bully at his own game where would we have been?"

Stella was looking very proud as she stood there with Ted's revolvers in her hands.

The boys gave a loud cheer for the brave girl.

* * * * * * *

The rest of the story is soon told.

Ted and the boys took the Faggott gang back to Mountain Springs securely bound, and landed them in jail, and after a trial for many crimes they were all landed in the penitentiary.

The Santa Piet Mine came into Stella's possession, and, as subsequent discoveries disclosed, the explosion which had been intended to destroy them all revealed a deposit of gold that might never have been discovered otherwise.

THE END.

The next week's issue of the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY, No. 106, is entitled "King of the Wild West Underground; or, Stella to the Rescue."

About the Early Numbers of **Tip Top Weekly**

We receive hundreds of letters every week from readers asking if we can supply the early numbers of Tip Top containing Frank's adventures. In every case we are obliged to reply that numbers 1 to 300 are entirely out of print.

We would like to call the attention of our readers to the fact that the Frank Merriwell Stories now being published in book form in the Medal Library are inclusive of these early numbers. The first book to appear was No. 150 entitled "Frank Merriwell's Schooldays."

We give herewith a complete list of all the stories that have been published in book form up to the time of writing. We will be glad to send a fine colored cover catalogue of the Medal Library which is just filled with good things for boys, upon receipt of a one-cent stamp to cover postage.

The Price of The Merriwell Books is Ten Cents per Copy. At all Newsdealers

Frank Merriwell at Yale.	Medal No. 208.	10c.
Frank Merriwell Down South.	Medal No. 189.	10c.
Frank Merriwell in Camp.	Medal No. 258.	10c.
Frank Merriwell in England.	Medal No. 340.	10c.
Frank Merriwell in Europe.	Medal No. 201.	10c.
Frank Merriwell in Maine.	Medal No. 276.	10c.
Frank Merriwell on the Road.	Medal No. 300.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Athletes.	Medal No. 233.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Bicycle Tour.	Medal No. 217.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Book of Physical Development.	Diamond Hand-Book No. 6.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Bravery.	Medal No. 198.	10c.
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Frank Merriwell's Chums.	Medal No. 167.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's College Chums.	Medal No. 312.	10c.
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Frank Merriwell's Hunting Tour.	Medal No. 197.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Loyalty.	Medal No. 254.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's New Comedian.	Medal No. 324.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Opportunity.	Medal No. 288.	10c.
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Frank Merriwell's Problem.	Medal No. 316.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Prosperity.	Medal No. 328.	10c.
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Frank Merriwell's Races.	Medal No. 212.	10c.
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Frank Merriwell's Trip West.	Medal No. 184.	10c.
Frank Merriwell's Vacation.	Medal No. 262.	10c.

A CHAT WITH YOU.

EDITORIAL NOTE.—The deluge of letters of praise pouring into our editorial rooms has impelled us to open this department, where, from week to week, we may meet our multitude of enthusiastic young readers and answer various questions concerning sports afield. If you desire to know anything connected with outdoor life, hunting, fishing, fur-collecting, or cowboy life on the plains, ask freely, since on our staff we have editors who are thoroughly posted in all that pertains to healthy sport in the open. In many cases we may have to abbreviate letters; but it shall be our aim to print everything that we believe must prove of interest to the great body of readers. We shall also, when not requested otherwise, give the address as an evidence of good faith.

The ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY is one of the most interesting and best novels written. I know this because I've read a great many others. CHAS. FROHNE.
71 Lexington Avenue, Brooklyn, N. Y.

May you read a great many more and enjoy them as well as you have the others.

I have been a reader of the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY since the first number, and am so well pleased with it I can hardly wait from one issue till the next. I have read quite a lot of Western literature, and pronounce the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY superior to them all. Ted Strong was a "king" in every sense of the word, and highly deserves the title, King of the Wild West, and has as noble a band of boys as ever lived. A. L. LAWLER.
Box 274, Timpson, Tex.

A clever letter neatly summing up the opinion of thousands of readers.

I have been reading ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY for about one year, keeping up each number, and I think they are the best stories ever written. ROCO BAGAGLIO.
Olneyville Square Market.

Everybody agrees with you in saying that they are the best ever written.

Of all the books I have ever read, the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY beats them all, and I read a great deal of all kinds of stories.
310 Jay Street, Schenectady, N. Y. HOWARD OLIVER.

The stories of Ted Strong and his heroic deeds are undoubtedly the best ever written for young men.

I have read your ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY from numbers one to ninety-four, and they certainly are the best books that I ever read without a doubt. I like Ted Strong the best, and then big Ben Tremont. OLAF GULLICKSON.
217 E. Washington Avenue, Madison, Wis.

Ben Tremont is one of Ted's right-hand men.

In speaking of the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY, I will say they are the best stories I have ever read, and I also admire Ted Strong's nerve and all the rest. The way he does business is grand, and I wish to thank Mr. Taylor for getting up such a story. I have read every book that has been published. I would like to recommend them to all boys who want a good story.
Linton, Green County, Ind. JOHN PLATT.

They are the best stories ever written without any doubt.

I have been taking a weekly copy of the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY, and find it very interesting. OTTO STROEHLIN.
Southington, Conn.

You find that the happiest day in the week is when you get your copy of the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY.

I think that the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY as it stands is far above the rest, but I think it could be improved on if it had more happenings on the ranch herding cattle.
Yours truly, ELLIS GIRTON.
Langhorne, Bucks County, Pa.

Mr. Taylor at present finds that Ted's experiences take place away from the ranch, but later on his biography will contain everything of importance that has occurred at the famous Moon Valley Ranch.

I have been reading the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY from the time it was first published, and find it the best book I have ever read. Nick Carter, Diamond Dick, and your ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY are fine.
Please tell Mr. Ned Taylor that I was asking for him, and that I hope he will meet with success with his ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY. WILLIAM MURPHY
15 St. Paul's Avenue, Jersey City, N. J.

Mr. Taylor thanks you for your kind words.

I went to a newsdealer and bought a ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY I read, and liked it. So did the other boys. I began to try of the other kind, but they were no good. I have read about ten of the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY stories. I think they are [illegible] as any, and better. I am going to get them every Sunday. I let the other boys read them, so they buy them now. I do not think of any more to write. RALPH PROUTY
P. O. Box 425, Stafford Springs, Conn.

Everybody likes to read the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY.

I have just been reading No. 94 of ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY, and thought I would give my opinion of it. I read everything I can get my hands on, but Ted Strong beats them all. He always puts up a plucky fight, and he always treats his prisoners good. Ben and Bud are two good fellows, just the kind I like to read about, and so are all the rest. I think Ben Tremont is a pretty plucky fellow to capture all of the bandits alone, and Ted and Bud showed their pluck in telling Ben to blow up the house. They are the kind I like to read about. NORMAN LAMBERT
74 Kingston Avenue, Port Jervis, N. Y.

There is no Western hero whose deeds we read about to-day that can compare with Ted Strong.

I have read ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY from numbers one to ninety four. One day I was in a book-store looking over the books. A friend picked up a copy of the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY, and showed it to me, praising it highly. Since then I have been getting it every week, and I think it one of the best five-cent books published.
Best wishes to Street & Smith and Mr. Taylor.
208 Brussels Street, St. John, N. B. J. H. THOMPSON

No doubt you feel that your friend did you a great favor in calling your attention to the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY.

I buy the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY very often. I lend them to my father, grandmother, cousin, and to all the boys in the neighborhood. Everybody pronounces it great. R. A. KEECH
160 Hamilton Street, Providence, R. I.

You have organized a family reading circle, it seems.

I have read your ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY from one to the current number, and I think it is the brightest and most exciting book I ever read. All my boy friends in our club read it, and they can hardly do without it. J. G. HARE
705 Church Street, Norfolk, Va.

The ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY holds the attention of the reader from start to finish.

My brother Arba and I have been reading your ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY for the last four months. We like it so well that we have ordered nearly all the back numbers from our news-dealer, and must say that we have never read any book or paper that we liked so well. We generally read two a week, the last edition and a back number.
Keep up the good work and we will continue to buy.
My father sometimes reads them himself. In fact, we read every day in the week, including all day Sunday.
228 West Mill Street, Independence, Mo. ARGUS CONNER.

This is the kind of letter that shows the popularity of the famous ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY.

[illegible] t ROUGH RIDER WEEKLIES, and I am [illegible] Ted Strong, Bud, Ben, Carl, Kit, and the [illegible] will read the other numbers as they come [illegible]

Always having liked soldiers, sailors, and especially cowboys, I am very much interested in this library. CARL A. HANSON
16 East Eighty-fourth Street, New York City, N. Y.

There is something so fascinating about a cowboy's life that none of us get tired of reading about the great West

---

The ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY is the best Wild West weekly that I ever read, and I like to read every [illegible] I can get. [illegible] CARLSON
5021 Cottage Grove Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

This is praise worth having.

I read the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY every week, and I think that they are the best Wild West stories ever published. I have read them from the beginning, and I am going to keep on reading them, and I wish to say that any boy who reads Wild West stories will find that the young rough riders are the best ever.
4873 Merion Avenue, Philadelphia, Pa. THOMAS BRADLEY.

We hope that all our other young friends get as much keen enjoyment from reading these famous stories as you do.

I think the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLIES are the best Western stories published. I have been reading them ever since they were first published. WILLIAM BLACKBURN.
Georgetown, Ky.

The ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY seems to be as popular in the South as anywhere else.

I am very much interested in the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY, and I get one nearly every Friday in Mr. Hazelbart's store in the town of Haverstraw, N. Y. GEORGE CHAPMAN.
P. O. Box 279, Haverstraw, N. Y.

During the week you probably can hardly wait for the days to pass till Friday and the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY makes its appearance.

As I read the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY, I thought I would tell you what I thought about it. It is the best paper I get, and I get many story-papers. I have been reading the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY for a long time. I like it very much.
Box 52, Centerville, S. D. TOMMY THORSON.

Ted is a wonderful young man.

I have been in the habit of buying these books for a long time. "The King of the Wild West's Submarine" was fine. I can tell you it is the best book I ever read. I think I will buy this book for the rest of this year. ARTHUR MCMANN.
Box 133, Grand Haven, Mich.

You will become so enthusiastic that you will read of Ted's adventures longer than that.

I have read the Ted Strong book since it started, and I think it is the best story I ever read. I will always stick to him.
Hackensack, N. J. JOHN KRUSE.

Stick to Ted and you will come out all right.

I have read ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY about as long as I have *Tip Top Weekly*, and I think it is the best book of Western adventure printed. I like the spunk of Ted Strong and his comrades. I think he is the bravest lad that ever was.
South Fourth Street, Paducah, Ky. REEVES ELLIOTT.

This is the best collection of Western stories ever placed in the hands of readers.

Have read ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY from No. 1 to the latest, and consider it a fine story of Western heroes. Ted Strong is not only a gentleman, but a thorough cowboy and a man well acquainted with all Western ideas. His spotless character makes him well liked and admired by a host of friends, among whom [illegible] Kit Summers, Carl, Bud, and all the other rough riders. I [illegible] now close, hoping the weekly will continue to live for many [illegible] HIRAM R. SWIGLES.
[illegible] alo, N. Y.

[illegible] writer is very appreciative of the merits of this great weekly.

I have read the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY since it first came out, and find it the best novel on the market to-day. I like it because it [illegible] the same plot twice, as some other novels I could [illegible] Ted Strong is an ideal American, who shares the same [illegible] in many respects. Have you all the back numbers of the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY for sale? Ben Tremont and [illegible] Morgan are favorites of mine, the first because of his [illegible] and the latter on account of his skill, wit, and straightforwardness. W. G. RUTLEDGE.
[illegible] Cedar Avenue, Hampden, Baltimore, Md.

We will send you back numbers upon receipt of regular price, five cents a copy.

I thought I would write and let you know I was a reader of Ted Strong novels. GEORGE BROOKS.
Box 378, Canton, Pa.

A short letter, but we welcome you to the fold of ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY readers.

The ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY is the most interesting book I ever got hold of.
I have read all the numbers from No. 1 to 95, and I am going to keep on reading them. MORRIS VLADYKA.
743 East Washington Street, Newton, Iowa.

Just tell your friends what an interesting person Ted Strong is, so that they will read the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY and find out for themselves.

I think that the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY is the best book of Western life printed. Its fascinating stories and perilous adventures are indeed very interesting. I am not a subscriber, but buy the book every week. The deeds done by the hero, Ted Strong, are not exaggerated, as in other books, but seem to be more natural. JAMES SHEEHAN.
Rochester, N. Y.

Ted never overdoes a thing. His actions are perfectly natural throughout the stories. He acts just the same as you or anybody else would under the same circumstances.

I saw the advertisement in the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY. I must say that the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY is the best book I have read. They are the bravest company of boys in the Wild West. Ted deserves his title, King of the Wild West. I have read about one-half of the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLIES, and will send for the rest of the back numbers by and by. AUGUST ROTH.
535 Beaver Street, Lancaster, Pa.

Ted Strong won his title, King of the Wild West, by hard work. He battled constantly with "bad men" and cattle thieves till he compelled them to acknowledge his superiority.

I have just read "King of the Wild West's Submarine; or, The Search for the Sunken Treasure," and I think it is the best book of that kind I have ever read. JOHN MCCABE.
672 Prospect Place, Brooklyn, N. Y.

That number of the ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY seems to be a great favorite with many of our readers.

I have read all the numbers of this fine weekly, and I think the stories rank next to *Tip Top*. I like the stories fine, and hope you will continue publishing this weekly many years. I would like to hear more of Ted's old ranch and lots more of his sweetheart. It seems like Mr. Ned Taylor has about forgotten [illegible] two things. But it has many other fine points to make up [illegible]. J. L. BYRUM.
3216 Chamberlain Avenue, East Chattanooga, Tenn.

Perhaps Ted and his friends will soon go back to his ranch.

GET A SET OF THESE FREE!

The Rough Rider POST CARDS

THOUSANDS of boys everywhere will agree with us when we say that the Rough Rider Weekly contains the best stories of Western adventure that ever were written. The author, Ned Taylor, is a Western man—born and raised among the strong, self-reliant cowboys.

We will send a set of handsome post cards, six in number, to every boy who will write and tell us what he thinks of No. 106 of Rough Rider Weekly, entitled "King of the Wild West Underground; or, Stella to the Rescue."

These cards are highly attractive, being printed in many colors, showing just what Ted Strong, the King of the Wild West, and his comrades look like. They are equal to the kind you pay five cents each for and are just what every boy, who is making a collection, will want.

Remember, they are entirely free and every boy who says a good word for Rough Rider will receive a set.

STREET & SMITH PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

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AT the present time over one hundred thousand copies of TIP TOP are sold throughout the United States every week! There are many good reasons why boys like TIP TOP better than any other five cent weekly publication. Why do YOU like it?

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These cards are illustrations of Frank Merriwell, Brad Buckhart, Obediah Tubbs, Joe Crowfoot, Dick Merriwell, and Cap'n Wiley.

They are printed in many colors and will be a fine addition to any boy's collection of post cards. Write now. They are free.

FRANK MERRIWELL

STREET & SMITH

PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

THE ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY

ISSUED EVERY MONDAY. **HANDSOME COLORED COVER**

Ted Strong wants to make your acquaintance, boys, and we are convinced that you will be proud to have him as a friend. The tales of his adventures among the cowboys are full of fascinating interest. He is known to every one as "King of the Wild West" and he upholds the title.

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